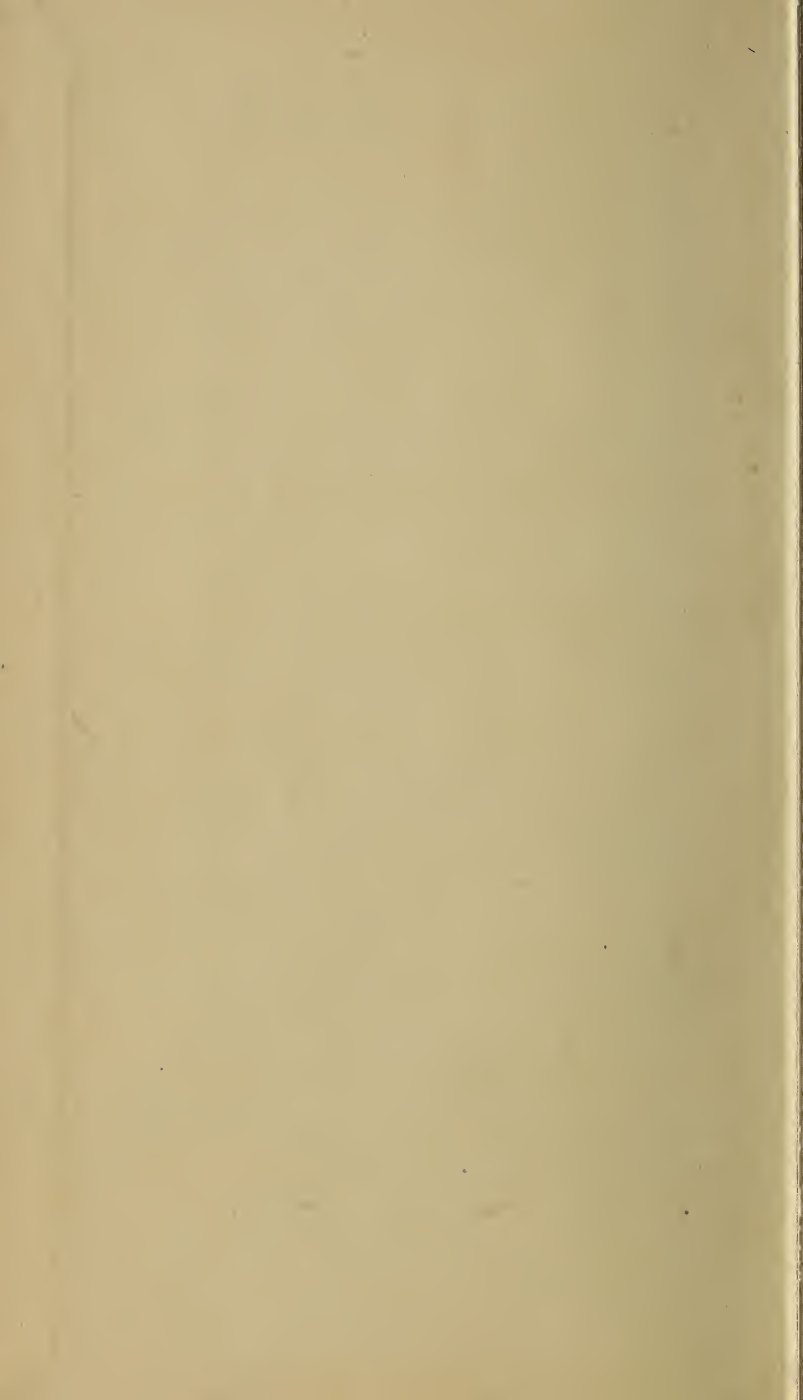


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A

JOURNEY

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FROM

EGYPT TO JERUSALEM,

OR THE

ROAD TO HAPPINESS.

— — — — —
BY ELIJAH R. SABIN,
MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL.
— — — — —

BOSTON:

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1811.

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DISTRICT OF MASSACHUSETTS—To wit :

BE IT REMEMBERED, That on the fourteenth day of December, A. D. 1810, and in the thirty fifth Year of the Independence of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, ELIJAH R. SABIN of the said District, has deposited in this Office the Title of a BOOK the Right whereof he claims as Author, in the following Words, *to wit :*

“ A Journey from Egypt to Jerusalem ; or the Road to Happiness. By Elijah R. Sabin, Minister of the Gospel.

In conformity to the act of Congress of the United States, entitled “ An act for the encouragement of Learning, by securing the copies of Maps, Charts and Books, to the Authors and Proprietors of such Copies, during the times therein mentioned ;” and also to an Act intituled, “ An Act supplementary to an Act, intituled, An Act for the Encouragement of Learning, by securing the Copies of Maps, Charts and Books, to the Authors and Proprietors of such Copies during the time therein mentioned ; and extending the Benefits thereof to the Arts of Designing, Engraving and Etching Historical, and other Prints.”

WILLIAM S. SHAW, *Clerk of the District of Massachusetts.*

TO THE READER.

THE most of what follows in these pages is the author's own experience. He has, however, taken the liberty to describe some particulars in the experience of others, that all the hinderances, and excellencies of the way be seen and understood. The author fancies, that though the sentiments in general may not be new, yet the method is; and that the serious enquirer after happiness will by carefully reading, find many things worthy of his attention. He has long wished that a subject of this kind, written in a plain and popular style, might appear in publick: but whether what is here offered, will answer the design, must be left to the judgment of the reader. He will do well, however, to read with serious impartiality, before he either justifies or condemns it. He is sensible, that there may be things which will not agree with some articles of the creed adopted by some of his Christian brethren: yet he hopes for candour even from these, and flatters himself there will be many things, which will be found conducive to holiness for all christian believers. Whatever any may judge, he is not conscious of having written any thing to wound the feelings of the pious; but wholly to assist and comfort them. Such as it is, he ventures to put it into the hands of the publick, with a devout wish, that it might be instrumental of reforming many.

THE AUTHOR.

Boston, Dec. 4, 1810.

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MS. A. 1. 1. 1.

MEMORIAL

The following is a list of the names of the persons who have been appointed to the various offices of the Court of Sessions for the year 1810. The names are arranged in alphabetical order, and the offices to which they are appointed are indicated by the letters in parentheses. The names are as follows: (A) Andrew (B) Benjamin (C) Charles (D) David (E) Edward (F) Francis (G) George (H) Henry (I) Isaac (J) James (K) John (L) Lewis (M) Matthew (N) Nathaniel (O) Oliver (P) Philip (Q) Richard (R) Robert (S) Samuel (T) Thomas (U) Uriah (V) Vincent (W) William (X) Xenophon (Y) Zachary (Z) Zephaniah.

A JOURNEY, &c.

I WAS born and educated in the land of Christendom. My parents took much pains to instruct me in the principles of the Christian religion. They taught me that the way of evangelical wisdom was the only way of happiness. That I might be brought into, and walk in this way, they taught the necessity of repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ: that I must be born again; love God and keep his commandments.

These religious lectures had a serious influence on my mind. At the age of six or seven years was deeply convinced of sin, and made some attempts to *cease to do evil and learn to do well*. I had some sensible and comfortable drawings of the Holy Spirit; enjoyed much satisfaction in lonely meditations on God, and the things of futurity.

I already began to fancy myself in the road of happiness from Egypt to Jerusalem; and that nothing would turn my feet aside. But it was not long, before the enticing vanities of childhood and youth diverted my feet, and led me astray from the path of duty. My parents often *lectured* me on the subjects of piety and obedience. These usually made serious impressions on the mind, but were commonly soon effaced, like letters written in the sand. For the most part I was like a slumbering traveller, who thinks but little of his journey; and makes few or no enquiries, with a design to learn the road in which he is to travel. In this manner my time passed away till about fourteen years of age. At this time many became serious in their enquiries after the road to happiness; and some began their journey from the land of darkness and slavery to the city of

peace. My mind was now deeply convinced of the great importance, of engaging in the same pursuit. I saw I had greatly offended in grieving former impressions of truth; in having lived so long without God in the world; and having made no enquiries for the path of wisdom, or efforts to walk in it. A reformation both in heart and life now appeared absolutely necessary, in order to escape the threatenings of the divine law, and to enjoy the happiness of grace and glory. I broke off from outward follies, made many resolutions to lead a new life, and to join with others in the way to felicity. But my reformation *was like the morning cloud and early dew, it soon passed away*, and gave place to sinful pleasures.

About one year afterward was convinced again, that I was not in the way to happiness; but in the way to misery. My distress and sorrow were not a little augmented, on calling to mind the deep and lively impressions, which truth had made on my heart; the kindness and long suffering of God toward me; and the manner in which they had all been slighted. I had recourse to the means of grace and gospel instruction; and with tears and groans of distress bewailed my guilty situation and want of happiness. God was propitious to my cries, appeared for my help, granted a degree of peace and heart-felt consolation. This continued a few months, after which a gradual decline took place; a stupid negligence and then down-right rebellion succeeded, and the bonds of divine love were violated, by which the Parent of Goodness had kindly bound me to himself.

The above sketch need not be considered as a mere fancy or as the picture of an individual; it should rather be taken as the experience of many. It is true, all may not have been favoured with the instructions of religious parents; neither at so early an age have been taught the emptiness of worldly enjoyments, and the necessity of seeking happiness in the durable riches of Jesus Christ. But have you not been favored with the convincing influence of the Holy Spirit; and with loud calls from the word and providence of God?

Have you not deeply felt the depravity of your nature, the criminalty of your conduct ; and the real necessity of a reformation in heart and life ? Have you not made and broken many *serious* resolutions ; by which the impressions of truth have been weakened and overcome ? these things may be artfully concealed from men ; but you cannot veil them from God and your own consciences. The love of sinful pleasures, together with fear and shame, may strongly operate to suppress these convictions, and the discovery of them by your vain associates ; yet you cannot but well remember the deep distress and bleeding anguish of your hearts, when you have felt the extreme insufficiency of earthly enjoyments, to a capacious and immortal soul, and the certainty and terror of an approaching judgment. And though in the midst of your gaiety, you labor to think as little as possible of future accountability ; and also attempt to destroy moral sensibility, and ease the pain of a wounded spirit, by having recourse to the company of your friends and their merriments ; yet in your lonely moments you are pierced with serious and bitter reflections ; and even in your brightest scenes of pleasure, you are unavoidably stung with guilty remorse ; which makes you sigh in the midst of laughter, embitters your best sensual delights, and leads you sometimes to conclude, that of all persons you are the most miserable.

If the above description is true, it will appear that I was not alone in the way of misery, and though mistaking the object, yet in the pursuit of happiness ; it will also appear, that most men miss their way, and seek happiness in objects which have it not. If in the beginning of our course there is found such a likeness in our pursuit, desire and disappointment of happiness ; I can but flatter myself, that this subject will so excite your attention, as that you will mark the road here described, and set out therein as travellers to the happy land. It is to be hoped, you will not meet with so many hinderances in the way to the land of promised rest, as I have done ; but should these fall to your share ; the happiness of being made heirs of an incorruptible inheritance here, and the possessors of it hereafter, will more than

compensate for all present and painful embarrassments.

After having declined from the serious pursuit of happiness above described; for several years I thought but little of it; or of any thing which belonged to religion. I neither set myself in pointed and open opposition to it; nor yet had any real and lasting desire to possess and practice it.

But this indifferency subsided, and gave place to a settled enmity against *revealed truth*. This however could not be done at once, but must be brought on by slow degrees and many reasonings. It was very difficult to rest in a system so opposite in its doctrines, hope, and tendency, to the one in which I had been educated. My infidel queries were soon known, and many highly congratulated me on the prospect of my happy escape, from the degrading and painful *shackles* of *Sacerdotal bigotry* and *superstition*. They volunteered their services to induct me into their much esteemed system. This they did more by ridiculing christians and their creed, than by *sober* and *solid* argument in defence of their own. I soon imagined there were many inconsistent and contradictory things in christianity; and could overturn the whole fabrick: having learned from my conceited predecessors to substitute *wit* and *ridicule* for *convincing* and *reasonable* arguments. Could conscience have been *annihilated*, this method would have succeeded very well for the *present*: she proved a very treacherous and troublesome *inmate*. If at any time I darkened the *windows* of the understanding to keep out the light of truth; or shut the door of the heart, that the Saviour might have no entrance; she would watch her opportunity at some funeral, or under some powerful sermon, and *fold back* the shutters and fling open the door, and before they could all be again closed; the truth and importance of religion in order to lasting happiness, would so deeply fix themselves in the mind, that many days or weeks elapsed, before I could dispossess them, and enjoy another pleasurable sleep in the darkness of sin, and on the downy bed of carnal ease. And it was a long time, before I could sleep so soundly, as not to be terrified with dreams of death, judgment, and

ternity. *Opiates* of one kind and another were daily taken, but not always with the wished for success. In spite of all the resistance made by *infidel wit* and *railery*, many evidences of the truth of divine revelation forced themselves on me; and discovered my wretchedness and guilt, and caused me to tremble in view of the approaching event. At these seasons I could but reflect, if christianity possessed the character it claimed, the subject was too weighty and important to be trifled with, or to be passed by unexamined. At times I was half persuaded to enter into a candid enquiry, and impartially examine the evidences in its favor. At others, was ready to pronounce it an entire farce, carrying with it such notorious marks of absurdity and contradiction, as to be unworthy the notice of a *free-thinking wise-man*. Thus tortured with anxious suspense between a fear of its proving true, and a wish that it might be false, I hardly knew which to choose, or what course to take. A want of happiness could not be denied, and an ardent thirst for it was equally to be perceived. In this situation it was easily seen there could be no happiness. In order to this a confirmation in the truth of deism must take place, or an establishment in the truth of the bible.

Several things had contributed to this anxious and unsettled state of mind. But nothing more so, than some points of doctrine, which were taught in the Westminster Catechism and Confession of faith. It seemed to me, that these could be reconciled, neither with sound reason, nor the bible. Although they had already made me suspicious of the truth of the scripture, and had greatly perplexed and distressed my mind; yet at length resolved to bestow on them a more careful investigation. Accordingly I took into consideration the following particulars.

1. God has *unchangeably fore-ordained* all things which come to pass.
2. He has from *all eternity unconditionally* elected some men to everlasting life; and in the same manner reprobated or *passed by* the rest.
3. Christ died only for a *part*; *those only*, have the strivings of the spirit, and invitations of the gospel.
4. Man has a nat-

atural power to do good actions, but no moral power. 5. Others indeed said, Christ had died for all, and that all were called by a common call, and had the gift of common grace; but that these neither did nor could save them; and therefore God had sent *special* and *irresistible* grace for the salvation of the elect. 6. It was said, that this was the only system of doctrine, which excluded *boasting*; and if we fulfilled any *conditions* in order to be saved, we should be proud; many went so far as to affirm, they had *nothing to do*, that Christ had *done all*, and made their salvation *unconditionally* sure.

I examined these propositions one after another; and the more I examined them, the more suspicious and doubtful they appeared.—*God has unchangeably foreordained all things which come to pass.*—I read in the *christian's book*, that those who disobey the gospel and die in their sins, shall be punished with *everlasting destruction* from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power: and that he reserves the unjust unto the day of judgment to be *punished*. But a query arose why God should thus punish them, if he had *decreed* all their actions. If his decrees are irresistible, they could do nothing different from what they have done. And if they are to be punished for not doing differently I could not see, but they must be punished for not breaking the *irresistible* decrees of God. It seemed also, that unless he had decreed against his own will, his decrees must accord with it: and, that those who fulfil the decrees of God, fulfil his will also; consequently, those who are punished, must be punished for doing as he *expressly* designed and decreed. It looked like a want of justice and equity, to doom men to everlasting punishment for doing as they were necessitated; and for doing the will of God in obedience to his decrees.

It was said, that God was a *Sovereign*, and had an uncontrolled right to decree their sins, and then punish them for sinning, to display the *glory* of his *justice*. I did not deny but God was a *Sovereign*; and as such he possessed a just right to determine the time and manner of creation; the different grades of beings he would create; the station man should hold in the scale of be-

ings; the time and place when each should be born; and when man had fallen, he had a sovereign right to fix the plan and terms of salvation;—he also distinguished Abraham from his kindred, and his posterity from the Gentiles in point of church privileges; he distinguished the tribe of Levi, from the rest of the tribes, by calling them to the priestly office; and Moses from every individual in the nation, when he shewed him his glory, and said unto him, *I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy*; he also distinguished the apostles from all other believers, when he said, *ye have not chosen me but I have chosen you* to be apostles; and when in the 17th of John he put up a special petition for them to be qualified for their office;—he had also afforded brighter dispensations to some nations than to others; and had given to individuals, or nations, one, two, or five talents of gracious privileges, as his righteous and God-like *sovereignty* had dictated.

Allowing this kind of divine sovereignty to be true, I could see nothing in it, which clashed with the bible, or with the dictates of right reason. My conscience *at this time* would not allow me to say, that *all this* was not verified in the providence of God towards the Jews and other nations; and clearly argued by the apostle in the 9th 10th and 11th chapters of the Epistle to the Romans; illustrated and proved by the parable of the talents; and taught also in many like scriptures. And it appeared still more plain, by observing that the servant in the parable who was condemned, was condemned for not improving his one talent. and not because he had not five given him. Nor was the approved servant approbated because he had five talents bestowed on him by his Lord, but because he had improved them. Nor did the distinguishing privileges of the Jews make them adopted sons of God without a proper improvement. On the contrary, the bible every where indicated, that the rebellious part of them were punished in proportion to the favors they had abused. Hence God had said to the Jews, that they only of all the families of the earth had he [distinguishedly] known, and therefore he would punish them for their sins. It was also

written, that it is accepted of a man according to that he hath, and not according to that he hath not; and where much is given much is required.

I knew not how to reconcile these and many other scriptures to the kind of sovereignty they ascribed to God. It seemed that goodness, truth and equity were as essential to his character, as sovereignty; and yet these attributes were *eclipsed* to brighten and exalt his sovereignty.—What becomes of his *goodness*, if he is absolutely merciless to a great part of his rational creatures; and has never made the least provision in the gospel, for them? What becomes of his truth, if he decrees the punishment of the non-elect, and their wickedness as the way to it; and yet in his word *declares* he takes no *pleasure* in the death of the wicked; but *wills* all to come to repentance and be saved? Can he decree their sin and destruction, and both take place as the accomplishment of the decree, and yet he have no pleasure in them? Is God pained with the accomplishment of his own decrees? If the decree which has secured their sin and punishment, is congenial with his will, he must have willed both: how could it then consist with truth for him to declare, he takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but *wills* all to come to repentance and be saved? Nor could I forbear to ask, what would become of his equity, if he necessitated some men to obey and be saved; and decreed and consequently *willed* the non-elect to disobey his commands and then eternally punish them for disobeying?—It appeared to me rather, that the divine sovereignty consisted, in dispensing the various privileges and blessings enjoyed by individuals and nations; and in dispensing rewards and punishments according to their improvement or non-improvement of those favours.

But my teachers on the contrary insisted that I entirely mistook the divine government; and was an enemy to the *sovereignty* of God. They said also, that most of the scriptures I had quoted, favoured their notion of sovereignty, and none of them disproved it. I said however this may be, it will require more than a mere assertion to convince me of the truth of it. And

as no arguments were advanced of sufficient weight to convince me of being wrong, in the above and many other queries on the same subject; what was said, only increased my suspicions, that the whole was *priestcraft*, and that the bible like a *fiddle*, would *play a tune* to any man's case. On the whole I concluded to dismiss this point for the present, and examine the *twin-doctrines* of unconditional election and reprobation.

It seemed impossible to reconcile the doctrine of unconditional election to everlasting life, with all the conditions of the gospel; and especially with the exhortations, to *seek the Lord while he may be found, and give diligence to make your calling and election sure*. It was a matter of no small difficulty to discover, how these and many more exhortations would apply either to the elect or non-elect. The former never could be in a state or time, when God would not be found by them; and yet the text strongly implied, that those addressed were in danger of having God refuse to be found of them. And there was never a time when God would be found by the latter; and yet the exhortation imported, that God would be found of the persons addressed, if they sought him in the accepted time. Why should he thus address the elect, if he would always be found of them; or why thus address the non-elect, if he would never be found of them! Nor could I find out any propriety in exhorting the elect to make their election sure; if God from all eternity had made it unconditionally sure: or in exhorting the non-elect to make an election sure, which they never had or even could have. For the former to be exhorted to make that sure, which had been *eternally and unconditionally* so, appeared too much as if they were to do the work of God over again; or to say the least, were to mend it. And for the latter to be exhorted in the same manner, I knew not how to clear God of the imputation, of exhorting them to break the decree of non-election; to be saved without an atonement; to be sanctified without divine influence, and to be satisfied with the bread of life, when there was never any provided for them.

I was astonished to hear from the pulpit and press,

we were after all, to be judged according to our works. This indeed was scripture language, but it was difficult to reconcile it with the doctrine of decrees and unconditional election. If all things take place as they are decreed, it did not appear, strictly speaking, that men have any works any more than *machines*. It looked like a ridiculous farce, that a day of judgment should be appointed to judge beings according to their works, who had acted under the influence of irresistible decrees, and whose fate had been *unconditionally* and *eternally* determined.

It was also said, that every mouth should be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God. But to me it appeared, that the *non-elect* would have every possible reason to reply: They might with boldness say, "Thou didst decree the first fall, and all our acts of wickedness, and we have never broken one of thy decrees, but have always been obedient to thy will in them; thou didst never give thy Son to make atonement for us; nor didst thou send thy spirit to strive with us, or gospel to invite us. And why should we be so dreadfully punished for not being saved from sin, when thy *non-electing decree* determined there never should be any Salvation for us? Must we be punished for not being saved without an atoning Mediator, a sanctifying spirit, or a gospel invitation? This looks like a want of equity and goodness." I thought they might say all this and much more if the doctrine they taught me were true. Indeed, on comparing what was called the *plan of God* in this world, and as stated above, with the sentence of condemnation which they said should be executed on the non-elect, I found such a raging enmity in my heart against God, that I thought if he had made me one of the non-elect and should pass such a sentence on me, I would make a desperate effort to dethrone him.

By this time I was half distracted with despair of never finding the ROAD OF HAPPINESS;—with what *then seemed* the perplexing, unreasonable and contradictory things I had been taught; added to a tear that the christian religion would finally prove true.

But these distressing exercises were in some degree overcome by reflecting, that if I was one of the *non-elect*, the believing what my teachers said was truth, would not change me into one of the *elect*; and if I was one of the *elect*, the rejecting that system and the bible with it, would not change me into one of the *non-elect*. And if the doctrines of irresistible grace and special calling were true, I was sure that God had never thus called me; but would if he had elected me, and when he did call, I could but obey; nor could I seek and find till the decreed time of special calling. And if one of the *non-elect*, he would never call me with a special call; nor would a common call ever reform and save me. When viewed either way, it seemed unnecessary and useless to make any religious efforts. For the special call could not be resisted when it came, and the common call would not save me. On the whole I made myself as easy as possible.

But I was told that such reasoning was dangerous; that no one should make himself easy by saying, "if I am elected I shall be saved, and if not, must be damned." All should make use of the means of grace, for they do not know but they are elected.

To the first of these propositions I proposed the following queries. If those who thus reason are of the *elect*, can they endanger their election by such *reasoning*? If not, how can it be dangerous? If God has decreed all things, do they not by thus reasoning fulfil his decrees? Is it dangerous to fulfil them or to do as he wills they should? To the second I queried as follows. Can any one of the *non-elect* be saved? Can any of the *elect* miss of salvation? Why may not men make themselves easy then, by saying if they are elected they shall be saved; if not they must be damned? On your system the saying is perfectly true, and may not men rest on the truth? Or would it be better for some of the *non-elect* to rest themselves on the false persuasion that they are elected? To the third proposition which proposes the use of the means of grace to all, I stated a few enquiries also. Can any use the means of grace, unless God has decreed they shall?

Can any use them who are decreed by God not to use them? And as you say God has decreed all things, and as we see some who refuse to use them, must we not believe that He has decreed they shall not? Could they use the means of grace without breaking that decree? If he had seen proper for these neglectors to have used them, would he not have decreed it? Why should you then pretend to be wiser than God, and say it is the duty of men to do, what he has in his wisdom thought proper to hinder them from doing by an irresistible decree? And as to what you say by way of argument, to prove the propriety of the use of the means of grace; that we do not know but we are elected, I can see no weight in it. For if our not knowing whether we are elected is an argument to prove we should use the means of grace; an equal want of knowledge whether we are reprobated, will form an argument of equal weight for not using them. With you it is a given point, that all are not elected. It is also granted that no one can know his election till he is favoured with the special call; and then he must know it. It is granted that common calls, and an outward use of the means of grace can never give this knowledge, or alter the final destiny of any one. Nor will it be denied, that all who neglect those means, were decreed to that neglect, and could not prevent it without a violation of the decree. And can any one reasonably suppose, that when there are many chances of being *passed-by* to one of being *elected*; when common calls can do nothing toward saving us; and when all men are under the government of decrees, which are perfectly consistent with the will of God: that the mere want of knowing whether they are elected, will be sufficient to make them feel it a duty to attempt using the means of grace, and thereby attempt to break the decrees of God and be saved by a common call?

This method of treating the subject, for a time gave my labouring and anxious mind a little ease. Although I did not feel perfectly secure, but had a secret remaining fear, that the threatenings of the bible would be found true; yet I excused and eased myself as much as

possible, by hiding under the *notion* that I could *do nothing*. But as my mind was now a little more composed, I prepared to examine the system further; and accordingly took up the proposition, *that Christ died only for the elect*.

I was surpris'd to find those who professed to believe, and explain the *good book*, say what seem'd a full and plain contradiction of it. On an impartial enquiry there could no passage be found, which said he *died not for all*, or *died only* for some. On the contrary it was written, that he tasted death for EVERY man; that God so loved the WORLD he gave his Son;—that he gave himself a ransom for ALL; and, that he is the propitiation for the sins of the WHOLE world.

It was objected that if Christ died for all, and all were not saved, he must have died in vain. It was thought that this objection was sufficient to prove, he died only for the elect.

But to this I replied. The scripture unequivocally says he died for ALL; nor does it give the least countenance to the objection. And as you profess to believe in scripture, I will give no heed to your objections, unless they are founded on it. You must also be sensible, that it teaches, that one great design of what Christ did, was to vindicate the honour of the divine government. And he so fully did this, that the Father declares, *he had magnified the law and made it honourable; and he was well pleased with his righteousness*. If this was done, and if one soul had not been saved, it could not be said he died in vain: unless it is a thing of nought, to maintain the honor and dignity of the divine government. And if we consider, if he had not died for all, and even for those who are finally condemned, and by his death made an offer of grace and salvation to them; he could never vindicate his justice in condemning and punishing them: unless it would be just for him to condemn them, for not believing he died for them, when he did not; and for rejecting grace which was never offered them. But now his justice can shine with meridian splendour, and all his ways be vindicated on the principles of purest equity.

And if we add to these weighty considerations, the numbers which will be finally saved, who will affirm he died in vain, though he died for all. One could not be saved without a full atonement, and when that was made, the way of salvation was made possible for all as well as for one. As I could not reconcile the doctrine with the bible, that Christ died for the *elect only*, and as it was affirmed perfectly consistent with it; and that it contained no different doctrines, I was more and more bewildered, and inclined to pronounce the whole bible system a medley of contradictions. But having begun to examine the subject, I would not dismiss it here, but passed on to find, whether it agreed any better with the bible to say, that the Spirit and gospel invited only the elect. On the strictest examination it appeared equally contradictory.

For it was written by the prophet Isaiah, "Look unto me and be ye saved, ALL ye ends of the earth." By John, that Christ was "the true light that lighteth EVERY man that cometh into the world;" and that the WORLD is reprov'd "of sin, of righteousness and judgment;" and by Paul, "the grace of God which bringeth (or affordeth) salvation had appeared (or shined forth) to ALL men," and that all men were commanded to repent: And when Christ gave his Apostles their commission, he bid them "go into ALL the world and preach the gospel to EVERY creature." My difficulties increased with every step. I knew not what Isaiah could mean, to invite all and intend only a part. It was a question whether it could consist with common honesty, and much less with a professor of righteousness. Nor did it seem any more consistent with *that principle*, for John to declare Christ a light to *all*; his Spirit a reprov'er of *all*; and for Paul to affirm that saving grace had appeared to all, if indeed the elect only were favoured with it. And it was equally strange, that all men should be commanded to repent, if in the gospel there was no provision made for the genuine repentance of the non-elect. But what appeared more astonishing still was, that Christ should command his apostles to

preach the gospel to EVERY creature, if there was no gospel or gospel blessings, for none but the elect. I could not see but preaching the gospel to all, when it was only for a *part*, would be preaching a lie to all those for whom it was not; and that Christ must have commissioned them to go to all such with a lie in their mouths.

But some said I misrepresented their system; that they did not believe unconditional reprobation; but Christ had died for all, that a *common* invitation and grace were sent to all; and that though God had unconditionally chosen the elect to eternal life, he had only *passed* by the *non elect* and left them to the *freedom* of their own *will*.

As to your denying the doctrine of *unconditional reprobation*, I have only to say, that John Calvin the Father of Calvinism has long since smiled with disapprobation on those, who are so timid, and soft as to deny the doctrine. Take his own words. Inst. B. III. ch. 23. s. 1. "Many" says Calvin "thinking to excuse (literally, *to drive away hatred from God*) so own *Election*, as to deny *Reprobation*. But this is too silly and childish; for Election itself, unless opposed to Reprobation cannot stand. All men are not created for the same end (literally, *in the same condition*) but some are fore-ordained to eternal life; others to eternal damnation. Therefore, according as every man was created for the one end, or the other, we say he was predestinated to life or death. God, of his own will and pleasure so ordains, that amongst men, some should so be born, as to be devoted from the womb to certain death, who by their destruction, might glorify his name." Many more like quotations might easily be produced; but these are sufficient to shew, that the *learned Calvin* was neither so ashamed of his own doctrine, nor so blind as not to see and own, that the doctrine of *unconditional election to eternal life* could not stand without its twin doctrine of *unconditional reprobation to eternal death*. And you also very well know, that *Dr. Twiss, Piscator, Peter Martyr, Zuinglius*, Cole on the Sovereignty of God, Topladý and others have expressed the same things in substance, if not in word.

But it was replied, I had misquoted and misconstrued *Calvin's* words. This indeed has been often said, but has never been proved; and till some convincing proof is given I shall take it for granted, the quotation and construction are just.

My teachers having said the non-elect are left to the freedom of their will, and not unconditionally reprobated, I had the curiosity to enquire what they intended by the *freedom of the will*. They told me it consisted in making a free choice, though they had no power to choose good, yet as they freely chose to sin, they were worthy of eternal punishment. My curiosity was now stronger than ever; for I was so inquisitive as to ask, why creatures possessed of *free-will* could not choose good? It was said, because they were depraved. But how and why depraved? The answer was by the transgression and fall of Adam. How then can their will be free, or how can they have any freedom of choice, if the fall of Adam has given them such a taste and appetite for evil, that they can chuse nothing else; and are so averse to good, that they can but hate it? If Adam were a *free-agent*, it would seem, that he by his *free act* had *bound up the will*, and destroyed the *freedom* of all the non-elect. Sin is the only thing they can chuse, and there can be no freedom in this choice. For if by the sin of another they had an appetite given them, which leads them irresistibly to choose sin, there can be no freedom; unless freedom and necessity were of the same import. And as you say they have no power to chuse good, and as it is certain, they cannot resist the choice of evil but by the choice of good, so it is also evident that the appetite bound on them by Adam, and which leads to evil cannot be resisted, consequently the non-elect cannot be left to, or with any freedom of will.

And as to what they said of common calls, and common grace being granted to all, I could find nothing in the bible for the support of such distinctions. And admitting their truth, I could not see the smallest favor in such calls. For if God by means of Adam's sin had conveyed to their stomachs a moral sickness,

which made them loathe the bread of life, and was determined to do nothing to remove that sickness, or even to give a desire for a proper appetite; it was impossible for me to see what favor there could be, or what end God could have in giving his Son to die for all, and in sending to all a gospel invitation. This view of the subject led me to propose a few queries. Why did God give his Son to die for all, and send a gospel invitation to them and yet pass them by without a possibility of their being saved? why has he determined never to help the bad disposition of the non-elect? What benefit do they derive from the atonement, if Adam has bound them over to such a love of sin, as that they can never chuse it and feel it applied? Why does he invite them by his word and spirit if he sees them destitute of a power to come, and one they can never obtain? Is it not mocking his creatures to bring them into existence destitute of an appetite, and which was taken from them by the *personal sin of another*, and then to punish them for loathing gospel food?

But I was now charged with being ignorant of divinity, and of not understanding the refined sentiments of their system. Man (said they) has a natural power to do good, but has no moral power:* if it were not so he could not be blame-worthy.

On investigating these propositions it seemed as if they were liable to many objections. It was a matter of serious doubt, whether it were proper to say that the non-elect have *natural power* to do *moral actions*. Doing good is moral conduct, and if men have a natural power to do good, it is proper to say, that they have natural power for moral actions. Not professing much skill either in divinity or metaphysics, I was not very hasty to affirm it a contradiction to scripture and reason; but it appeared like a violent breach of both. And on searching the bible, I found that it was declared, *without Christ and his grace men could do nothing*: nor did it seem just to say, that the power which men enjoyed by Christ and his grace was *natural*; but rather one *gracious* and *moral*. If then, men have no pow-

* See two sermons preached by a Mr. Crane, of Sutton, Mass.

er to do good but by the grace of Christ ; and if it is wrong to call the power of grace a natural power ; in spite of all I could think or do, it would appear a contradiction to the bible for them to say, that men have *a natural power* to do good. And it seemed impossible for them to believe in the doctrine of total depravity, while they maintained that the power of chusing good, was left unruined in the fall.

Among other things I had the boldness to see, how their notion of natural and moral power would look in the form of logical arguments ; on trial they afforded the following.

All beings who have a natural power to do good, can do it.

Man has a natural power to do good : therefore man can do it.

All beings who have no moral power to do good, cannot do it.

Man has no moral power to do good : therefore man cannot do it:

This appeared like saying of man, in the same circumstances and at the same time, that he *could*, and *could not act*. It required more depth of penetration, and metaphysical knowledge, than I at that time possessed, to make out this any other than a downright contradiction. I wished also to know, whether the rules of reason required, that arguments should contradict themselves in order to make them true. If not, whether a contradiction did not destroy the truth of one or both : consequently whether both of the above could be true. But some pretended there was no contradiction ; but a perfect union between them. Others said, though they could not see their union, yet as the learned said they could, they rested on their authority, and thought it my duty to do the same. Others confessed they contradicted each other ; but nevertheless were both true ; and added for proof, that the language of the gospel was, *ye can come, and ye can't come*. But the most considered them as some of the secret and deep things of God, and that it was almost a certain mark of a reprobate, to doubt their truth or even to meddle with

them. But all these things were not enough to satisfy my mind, already too far gone into infidelity: especially when the following particulars occurred.

Christ said Mary had chosen the good part. Moses told the Jews he had set before them life and death; and commanded them to choose life, that their souls might live. Joshua called on them to choose that day whom they would serve. Such a choice must be moral, and could be made only by a moral power. Why should Christ say Mary *had chosen* if she had no moral power, and if Christ does all the *choosing* or electing? Why should Moses and Joshua command the Jews to make choice of God if it were impossible? It seemed that they might have said to these leaders of Israel, "You know we cannot choose till the day of God's *irresistible* power, or *special calling*; and then we cannot resist the choice. And if we are not of the elect, we can never choose to serve God; for when Adam fell he took from the non-elect all *power* or *disposition* to make such a choice, and God has determined never to restore it to them. Why do you then exhort us to choose when we have no power; and threaten us with punishment for not making the choice, when the power was taken from us by another without our consent. Beside, we have good reason to suspect you are not *orthodox*, to set us to work in choosing life and the service of God; this looks too much like *arminianism*, to be sound divinity. We understand the plan of salvation better than to expect to be *saved by our works*. If we are of the elect, God will *make us willing* to serve him in the day of his *irresistible power*; and if we are not, it is all in vain to attempt a compliance with your exhortations. Nor can we change ourselves into reprobates by serving idols; or into the elect by ceasing to serve them. We shall not therefore trouble our heads for the present, but be as easy as possible."

It appeared to me, that the Jews might have availed themselves of all these arguments in opposition to Moses and Joshua. But as they did not, I more than ever doubted whether their distinctions between natural and moral power; special and common grace, were

true. And my suspicions were not a little increased, when I found the bible represented men as placed under a moral government. But how men could be under a moral government without any moral power, was a mystery too deep for me. I also read, that God commanded all men to repent, seek, ask, knock, &c. But this to me was unaccountable, on the supposition that Adam had deprived the non elect of their moral power, so that they could not obey them. It was also written, that God had ascribed the actions of seeking, asking, and the like, to those who in a bible sense would be considered unrenewed; and that prophets and apostles had done the same to themselves: but how they could perform the actions ascribed to them without power, or why they should be ascribed to them as theirs, if they had never done them; or if in doing them they had been irresistably acted on by a superior agent, was a difficulty too great for me, and one, I desired them to remove.

Having already discovered so many things, which appeared inconsistent and contradictory, I was nearly on the point of rejecting the whole; and cared but little to defend any doctrine of the bible; but rather hoped and nearly believed, the whole was at best but a cunningly devised fable. Yet was so fixed against the peculiar doctrines of my education, that I was determined to take almost any stand in order to confute its defenders. In order to affect this, I set myself more particularly to find out the state, which the gospel represented man in, under its own dispensation. After carefully investigating the subject, it appeared, that if there was any truth in the bible, the mistake of my teachers lay in supposing (that what they called unregenerate) men to be now in the same state Adam was after the fall before the promise of a Saviour. And yet they held all men were in a state of probation. But it did not seem consistent either with reason or scripture, to suppose Adam on a state of probation as a fallen and unrestored creature. He was no doubt such before the fall, but as he fell, he fell below the privilege of a probationer; and never could be in that state again

until something was done for him on the plan of the gospel. And if nothing had been done for his posterity, and they had been left as Adam placed them by the fall, it did not appear, that they could even now be on a state of trial or probation. And if they were not, it was impossible to give any substantial reason, why the bible contains so many terrible threatenings to deter from sin, and so many gracious promises to excite to piety. Such threatenings and promises appeared no way consistent, unless those to whom they were addressed were on a state of trial. I said, suppose I am condemned to certain death, and have no more an opportunity to obey or disobey; am beyond the power of attempting to approve myself a loyal subject; what would all the threats and promises of the king be to me. The conclusion therefore was, that every threatening, invitation, command and promise, either proved men to be on a state of trial, or that the bible was priestcraft. And if they were so, they were not left in the state in which the transgression of Adam placed them; but had been favoured with some kind and degree of restoration; by which their condition was so far altered through the grace which was in Christ Jesus, that they were placed on a state of trial and made accountable to God, by being made able through that gracious restored power, to chuse the life offered in the gospel, when offered without money and price, and the offer set home, by the agency of the divine Spirit. Consequently, whatever power of good they have, is a gift of God through Christ; and not any *natural power* which was left unruined in the fall. And although this gift or restoration by which they were placed on a second state of trial, did not make them holy as Adam before the fall, nor supercede the necessity of sanctifying grace; yet it assisted them to chuse that grace, and made them *blameworthy* if they rejected it. If there was any truth or consistency in the gospel, it appeared to me this must be it; for I could see none in the other. But as it was confidently said, that this was intirely subvertive of the gospel, I more and more concluded to reject the whole as destitute of authority.

In opposition to this plan, I was told, that no conditions of salvation could be fulfilled, without boasting, and that their system was the only one which excluded it.

I said, does your system irresistibly exclude boasting? Have I not heard you say, you are *often* if not *always* proud? Where is then the boasted virtue of the doctrine? St. Paul says, that *boasting is excluded by the law of faith*. But is a system of unconditional decrees, unconditional election and reprobation, one and the same thing with the law of faith, that we must submit to it and believe in it in order to be humble? I cannot see, that a conditional salvation necessarily entails pride on all who believe in it. If so answer the following questions. Has not God said he will be sought unto to do all these things for us? Has he not commanded us to repent that we may not perish? and to believe, that we may be saved? Are not these conditions? Has he promised the blessings of the gospel without them? Or does God intend by thus commanding, that he will not have us seek, repent and believe? Or does the requirement of such conditions, prove there are none in the bible? If not, and if these are really conditions required by God, would he require them, if they could not be obeyed without making us proud? Remember also, that the exercises of repentance and faith are not acts of pride, but of humility. Hence those who act pride, neither repent nor believe; and those who act faith, do not act pride at the same time. And because the nature and exercise of faith are opposite to pride and inconsistent with it, the apostle declared *boasting was excluded by the law of faith*; and not because he preached an unconditional gospel. And if we are to believe the scripture representation of the subject, it is certain, that those who are under conviction and repentance for sin; clearly see they have a thousand times forfeited all title to divine favour; and that it is the pure unmerited goodness of God, which has *continued* the calls and offers of mercy. And it seems perfectly agreeable to the bible to say, that a sight and sense of forbearing goodness and redeeming love on the part of God; and

the forfeitures and unworthiness on their own part, will be sufficient to humble them, and to exclude boasting. God has made it their duty to repent, believe, love, and obey; and when they have done it, they have done no more than their duty, consequently have nothing to boast of. You grant that boasting is possible to those who believe in your system; and it is no more than possible, in the belief of the other: it cannot be unavoidable.—*This* view of the subject not only affords sufficient cause of humility; but opens the bowels of pity toward those, who do not accept of mercy. But if God had *passed them by*, why should you pity them, seeing He had no pity on them? Are you required to have more bowels of compassion than the God you worship, that you must pity those whom he has *passed by*, for not accepting a salvation, which was never offered them? If the blessings of the gospel are offered to all, and some will not accept, when grace has put it in their power, there is every possible cause of pity and tender concern on the part of those who do accept. In this view of the subject we have no surprize, to hear the prophet wishing *his head were waters and eyes a fountain of tears, that he might weep day and night for the sinful rejecters of divine mercy*. Or to hear the apostle declare, *he had great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart for the Jews who rejected the gospel*. Nor on this principle will it appear strange, to see Christ *weep over Jerusalem*, and to hear him say, *O Jerusalem! how oft would I have gathered you but ye would not*. But on your principle I can see no kind of consistency in all these and many other like passages. How would it seem for the prophet, Christ and his apostle, to be weeping and making so great an *ado* over the *non-elect*, when God had passed them by, and if your system be true, had eternally decreed their destruction! And it is impossible for me to tell, how you will exculpate them from the charge of hypocrisy.

But they called this carnal reasoning, and said the carnal mind was always opposed to this, which they styled the *doctrine of grace*. But I could not think, that it deserved to be *exclusively* named the *doctrine of grace*,

when it left the greatest part of men in an absolute graceless state. And as to the argument which said the carnal mind was always opposed to the doctrine, and therefore it must be true, this seemed to prove too much for their purpose, and consequently made against them. On examination it was evident, that there was no system of religion but what had those they called *carnal men* to oppose it, and if such opposition proved theirs true, the same would equally prove all the rest true: even deism and Mahometanism not excepted. Beside, to my knowledge most carnal men of my acquaintance were in favour of it; and drunkards, swearers, and other abandoned men plead it in their own excuse, and said it was *appointed*, that they should do thus and so, and that they were *left* to do it.

But after all it was insisted that they were right, and that the bible taught no other doctrine. They warned me against my errors. But the more they said, the more I was set against them, and the more inclined to reject Christianity and to believe deism.

Accordingly I set myself to reason further on the subject. I was not able to see how God could be an indivisible Being, if he commanded one thing and decreed the reverse. Their *good book* said, God had forbidden all sin on pain of death; but my teachers said, God had decreed men should sin. I could but compare two or three scriptures with a quotation or two from the writings of Calvin. *The wages of sin is death. If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die. Stand in awe and sin not. In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.* Compared with the following. *Calvin says, "God not only fore-saw that Adam would fall, but ordained that he should."* Take a quotation also from Piscator. "God made Adam and Eve for the very purpose, that they might be tempted and led into sin. And by the force of his decree it could not otherwise be but they must sin." Again, "We can do no more good than we do, nor less evil than we do. Further, "God from all eternity has precisely decreed that both the good and the evil should be done."—"God procures adultery, cursings,

lyings." Take another from Peter Martyr. "He [God] supplies wicked men with opportunities of sinning, and inclines their hearts thereto. He blinds, deceives, and seduces them. He, by his workings on their hearts bends and stirs them up to evil." "Nor is the Westminster Catechism and Confession of faith a whit behind them. They expressly assert that, "God did from all eternity unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass." You must now judge whether I am wrong, in supposing that if the bible and their doctrine were both true, they would prove God must have commanded man not to sin, and yet decreed he should sin. Indeed no one can deny it, if he observes, that the last quotation from scripture *forbid* Adam to sin and fall; and the one from *Calvin* says, God *ordained* he should fall. If both these be true, God must have had two opposite wills, or one will capable of two moral opposites. That is, a will from which flowed a *command* not to sin, and another from which flowed a *decree* to sin: or else these *moral opposites* flowed from the one will of God. And if God has commanded not to sin, and decreed the reverse, both these must be congenial with his will; hence it would suppose, that he willed the existence of sin, and willed it should not exist at one and the same time. The command and the decree, must be streams flowing from God the fountain, and as they must be like the fountain, and the streams being as opposite to each other, and as divided in their nature as sinning and not sinning, so there must be the same opposition and division in the nature and will of God himself: unless it can be proved that the streams which flow from him, do not resemble him in their nature. I said if all this be true, God must be divided against himself: nor could I help thinking, that a God thus divided, must be a God destroyed; consequently, atheism must be true.

But the doctrine of *atheistical chance*, and being at the disposal of its wild misrule. appeared so deformed and dreadful, I was ready to fly from it as from a furious spectre. No one can describe the doubts, fears, uncertainty and anxiety, which at this time rent and

distracted my mind. I could have wished to have been the most offensive brute, or the meanest reptile, rather than to be capable of such painful sensations. I often wished I had remained in a state of non-existence:—tried to doubt my existence:—sometimes in heart cursed God for giving existence to me:—I looked on the brutes with envy, and thought man the most wretched of all creatures. I grew extremely anxious to look into futurity, and to know what was beyond the grave. Had ten thousand worlds been mine, I would have freely given them all away, to have been indulged with the opportunity of going behind the curtain, [as I phrased it] and if I found a future existence true, to have had the liberty of returning and of preparing for it. I feared to venture on atheism, for all things around me proclaimed a God. I dared not embrace deism, because if there were a God, it seemed he must be a moral governor; and that his creatures must be accountable to him; which would lead to the doctrine of future rewards and punishments, and consequently would prove the bible true. Yet when I compared the doctrine I had been taught with scripture and reason, it appeared too opposite to command belief. My own notions of scriptural consistency were all *opposed*, called *carnal*, and *opposite* to truth; and *their system* affirmed to be the only true one. I was now brought to a point: Must either believe that God had commanded one thing and decreed the reverse; had allowed or rather decreed Adam to take away the moral power of the *non-elect*, and because they did not exert a power in chusing a life, which was never offered them, and which was so taken away, he passed by and punished them;—or I must reject the whole system of revealed religion. To do the latter was a great leap in the dark, and to believe the former, seemed unreasonable and impossible. After a while my mind was more composed, and better prepared for further reasonings; which here follow.

If God has decreed sin, the decree must be opposite to his will or congenial with it. If the decree accords with the divine will and nature: whatever flows from the decree as its own proper fruit, must be the same in

nature with the decree which produced it; and as the decree has a nature like God its author, so sin must have the same nature. And if sin possesses such a nature, he cannot hate it; unless he can hate his own nature; if he does not hate it, he must love it; and if he loves it he cannot love the destroyers of it. But in the bible Christ, the Holy Ghost, and the faithful ministers of Christ are represented as the designed and appointed destroyers of it, and yet held up as the objects of the Father's greatest love. This represented God as loving the existence and destruction of sin at one and the same time. It therefore appeared so like a contradiction, that I resolved not to believe it; but went on to say: sin has never taken place opposite to the decree of God, but perfectly according to it; and as the decree accords with the divine will, so must sin also. Sin therefore can be such only in name, for strictly speaking it cannot be an evil; unless it is an evil to do the will of God. Therefore there is no such thing as sin in the world; and if no sin, no need of an atoning Mediator, hence all the scripture says of such an *one* is only the invention of men. The bible may therefore do to keep old women and children in subjection; but is unworthy the belief of a sensible man. It therefore appeared, all that was necessary to give ease to the mind was to reject the bible, and all the doctrines I had been taught, except that of decrees; and then it was easy to see, that all men do the will of God, consequently he is pleased with all, and will punish none. I felt the more safe in doing this, on recollecting that predestination was the leading doctrine of the Stoic philosophers; and of most of the deistical writers of after ages.

The cloak of predestination which my teachers had thrown over my shoulders, for a while covered me very well. Conscience was more at ease; I already fancied myself in the Road to happiness, and expected soon to arrive at its utmost summit. The doctrine became so sweet and soul-stupifying, I could hardly rejoice enough for having escaped the bondage of *priestly* tyranny, and had at last found a place of rest for my

doubting, troubled spirit. If at any time doubts arose in my mind of the truth of predestination, I had recourse to the *fore-knowledge* of God. I said whatever God knows must *necessarily* come to pass; or he would be disappointed: and his *knowledge* and *decrees* are the same. For some time this manner of reasoning answered as a stupifying draught; and lulled asleep the senses of the soul.

But I could not be long at ease. In spite of myself the commission of evil would be attended with guilt; and conscience would sting like an adder. This led me to enquire whether guilt could flow from actions decreed by God, and according to his will? It cannot be. Either then my beloved doctrine of *predestination* is a mistake; or I am not yet freed wholly from the *spackles of education*. My fears were again excited, and I had serious reason to suspect my expectations of happiness were a delusion.

On examining the arguments founded on the knowledge and decrees of God, they appeared justly liable to many objections:—the following train of reflections were produced. A decree necessarily suppose a *decreer*, and the *decreer* must exist *prior* to the decree; consequently if the decrees of God and his knowledge are the same, he existed *prior* to his knowledge. He must therefore have been once destitute of knowledge, and ignorant of all events. But such a being could not be God, therefore atheism must be true; or there must be as great a difference between the decrees of God, and his knowledge, as between a Being of infinite knowledge, and one entirely ignorant.—A *decree* is an act of God, but *knowledge* is an essential attribute of his: and there must be a vast difference between an act and an essential attribute of God; and as great a difference between his decrees and knowledge. Nor is it satisfactory to say, that the infinite knowledge of God necessitates all events. For the most which can be argued from it, is the certainty of events; and an ignorant *school-boy* will hardly imagine, that *certainty* and *necessity* are of the same import. And it is equally unsatisfactory to say, the circle of infinite knowledge is

not sufficiently large for the conduct of *limited dependant free-agents*, without any infringement on their liberty, or disappointment to the divine mind. Beside it seems strange, because God is infinite in knowledge, his wisdom and power should be so circumscribed thereby, that he could not make a free-agent. For it is evident, if men cannot act as *free-agents*, in the circle of infinite knowledge without disappointment to God, this attribute so bounded and limited the rest, that the making of a *free-agent* was more than a match for Jehovah.

I was again at my wit's end, and knew not what course to take. It was plain that predestination could not be proved and supported by God's knowledge. I was driven out of this subterfuge and knew no proper way to return. I wished predestination true, but was at a loss how to support it. No argument in its favor appeared so strong, as was the argument against it, drawn from the guilt and remorse which accompany wrong actions. To call guilt and remorse the shackles of education was by no means satisfactory. I therefore tried to persuade myself, that God had placed what might be called the *law of reason* in every heart, and by means of it intended to make vice its own *present punisher*, and virtue its own *present reward*. But this could not keep conscience long quiet. To make this doctrine just, it appeared necessary that every vice should be attended with *penal guilt* proportionate to its criminality; and that all the committers of vice should live after the commission, long enough to be punished for the act of vice last committed. But on examination I found in some acts of vice I felt very little remorse, and at others felt more, when the vice was less criminal. —Some have a very tender conscience, and are exceedingly pained with small offences; and others live in habits of vice with little or no remorse. And many die in the perpetration of some enormous vice, and have no punishment for it in this life.

I was obliged to abandon this retreat also; and tried to content myself with calling my guilt the shackles of education; and hoped the time would soon come,

when they would be wholly thrown off, and I should walk in the *sweet liberty of infidelity*. To accomplish an end so desirable, I began to make observations on the doctrines and practices of Christians and Christian ministers.

It had heretofore stumbled me to observe the *seeming* opposition, which existed between the doctrines of many and the bible. But was much more so, on observing they could not agree among themselves. Each talked as if himself had been infallible, and as if all who opposed his belief were damnable heretics. Some affirmed God had decreed all things, as stated in Calvin's Institutes, Saybrook Platform, Westminster Confession of faith and Catechism. Others said some things only were decreed; and others that nothing was decreed. Some said man was morally lifeless and inactive as a stone; and others, that he could do all things required of him without divine influence. Some affirmed we must be born again; others, that the doing no harm, or a little outward morality was abundantly sufficient. Some said the finally impenitent should be punished eternally; others, that it should be limited, and others, that there was no future punishment. Amidst such a diversity of sentiments, who can tell which is right, or which to chuse. I little cared however to chuse either, but thought the more excellent way was, to reject them all.

I next set myself to observe Christian professors through the several ages of the church.—Oceans of blood have been shed by them; and the most wanton cruelties committed on those who have professed equal confidence in Christ. The most terrible *anathemas* have been hurled with vengeance one against another; and by which each has doomed the other to the lowest pit of misery. Even our forefathers who fled from the intolerant hand of persecution, so drank into the same spirit, as to hang the Quakers and banish the Baptists. Even *then* could I see malevolence and bitterness one toward another among the professors of the Christian faith. Many carried on intriguing and hypocritical practices, to build up themselves and ruin others.

The *book* which these christians professed to believe the word of the Great God to them; and by which they pretended to walk, I found forbid the wearing of gold and all superfluities of dress. But they habitually lived in defiance of these plain commands; and seemed to pride themselves in these ornaments as much as the most established unbelievers. The same book also commanded them to come out from the world; to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. But they appeared to love the company of the ungodly, [so called] and the fashionable amusements of life as much as others. They delighted in balls, theatres, and gambling tables; and though they were commanded to redeem their time, yet they trifled it away with as much apparent greediness and delight, as if they had thought God not in earnest in commanding. It said also, that believers must have their conversation as becomes the gospel, and seasoned with grace. But many of them swore profanely, jested, and used all manner of idle, trifling conversation. Their book commanded charity to the poor. But some of them were the most covetous hard-hearted people of my acquaintance. They were deaf to the cries of the widow and orphan; and I often found professed infidels of the two, the most liberal and tender hearted. The love of the world was strictly forbidden, yet they seemed animated by no other desire than to obtain its treasures, honors, &c. They neglected nearly all the duties of religion, to have more time to get the world; they defrauded and overreached, and gloried in getting what they called the *best end of the bargain*. They put on a *long sanctimonious* face on the sabbath, as if they had been saints in the suburbs of Heaven; but lived the rest of the week as if they had hardly believed there was a God. Many who were very zealous and warm in their professional duties for a season, turned back again and lived more wicked than I dared to do.

This indeed was not the character of all who professed religion; but it was true of many—Even among infidels, some were outwardly moral and honest. I therefore concluded, that honest men would be such, whether

christians or infidels; and from hence imagined, that the christian religion made no man better: and if there were any honest men who professed it. they were the simple, who had been deceived into the belief of it; and that it was only fit for a knave's cloak, that he might do wickedly unsuspected.

But on this point my faith was staggered, when I recollected that some of the greatest statesmen and philosophers the world had ever produced, who had some of them been infidels, and had fully investigated the subject of Christianity, and by such an investigation embraced it; and lived and died in the belief of it. Although I often lulled my conscience asleep, and quieted my fears; yet at intervals was much dissatisfied with my own reasonings. The dividing opposition of Christian professors, their persecuting bitterness; and immorality, had been a pleasing opiate, and caused me to sleep soundly on the bed of *infidel* and *sensual ease*. But various circumstances led me at length to doubt, whether the arguments, which had been drawn from those subjects, had that weight and authority in them, which I at first imagined.

By examining the subject, I found that divisions had existed not only among christians, but also among deists; which led me to reflect as follows. Some deists believe the immortality of the soul; others that it will be annihilated; and others, that after it leaves the human body, it will go and inhabit the body of some other animal. If then a division in sentiment among christians is a sufficient proof of the falsity of their system; a division of sentiment among deists is an equal proof, that deism is false. Nor is there a principle of civil law, anatomy, or physic, but has been controverted; and on which learned and able men have not been divided. It was therefore plain, that if a division proves christianity false, it will not only prove deism false also, but every discovery of the civil and natural world.

I had also ascribed all the feuds and bitterness of professors to religion as its proper fruits and effects. Yet I had many serious doubts whether it was correct;

because the bible taught no such thing : on the contrary, it breathed love and good will, and commanded its believers to possess and exercise the same spirit. Therefore all this bitterness and persecution would rather seem the abuse of religion than as the proper fruit of it. Deists also professed it as a part of their creed, to love one another ; and yet there has been much bitterness and cruelty among them. It was therefore evident, if Christianity must be accounted false because some of its professors have been cruel and bitter, in opposition to its precepts ; deism must also be false, on account of the cruelty which its votaries have also exercised.

When I came to examine the subject of morality ; I found deism professed morality as well as Christianity. However immoral myself and others were, I would not own that either article of my creed made immorality a duty ; nor were there any who would. There were however many immoral, very immoral professors of deism. It could not therefore be denied, if immorality in Christian professors proved their system unsound and untrue ; the same immorality among deistical professors, would equally prove theirs unsound and untrue. And almost all the arguments which I attempted to bring against Christianity, turned back on me in the same manner ; which at times almost confounded me, and half persuaded me to renounce my system. And though my conscience often accused me of the insufficiency of these arguments, and made me timid and fearful ; yet I sometimes found means to suppress my fears, and became bold and confident.

I availed myself of what I called the mysteries of the Christian religion ; and pretended they were so numerous and of such a nature, that they were sufficient, to justify a sensible man in rejecting the whole book, which contained them. The Unity of God, and Trinity in Unity were too mysterious to command belief. Nor did it seem less difficult to believe, that the innocent unoffending Son of God should die for those called rebels against him ; and by his death make atonement and reconciliation for them. This reasoning led me into the well known deistical notion, that men are under

no obligation to believe what they cannot see and comprehend. I added, I never saw Christ, the Holy Ghost, or religion; never heard Christ speak, and how do I know there was ever such a being; or that he ever spake to the people; or if there was, and if he did speak, and if it was revelation to those who heard him, it can at best only be hearsay to me.

But in most of my reasonings and objections I labored under a serious difficulty; I could not destroy the sensibility, or still the voice of conscience. She took up the last objections, and beginning with what I had said of mysteries, she addressed me as follows.

“If you will believe nothing but what you can see and comprehend, you must disbelieve the existence of a God, for you never saw him; nor can you comprehend his existence. And there is nothing more incomprehensible and mysterious in the Trinity and atonement, than in the unity of his existence. And if there can be such evidence of God's existence as to command belief, without seeing or comprehending him, why may not the Trinity and atonement have evidence equally commanding! Have you so impartially and seriously examined the subject, as to be certain, they are attended with no such evidence. Through unwillingness to believe, you may have shut out the evidence of their truth from the mind. Look over the subject again, and do not too hastily pronounce it incredible. And on your present method of reasoning, there can be no such thing as *wind*, for you can neither see nor comprehend it. You will also reject the credibility of all history; especially, that part of it which relates to things you never saw, or were able to comprehend. Neither will you believe your own existence, or the existence of any thing besides. For the most skilful *anatomist* has never yet dissected the human body, so as to find out and comprehend all its hidden properties; nor has the most curious *chymist* ever so analyzed matter, and so traced it up to its first principles, as to know and comprehend all its mysteries. And if you fix on but one property in relation to the human body, [which is muscular motion,] it will be found an un-

discovered and incomprehensible Secret: although the knowledge of it has been searched after by the learned and curious of all ages. And shall this be rejected because it cannot be understood? If there be no want of evidence, to induce men to believe it, though it cannot be comprehended, why may not the mysterious things of the gospel, have a sufficiency of evidence also? —What is there more mysterious and inconsistent in the atonement made by Christ, than for an honest man out of pure kindness, to discharge an insolvent debtor, and put him in a condition to retrieve his affairs?" Conscience went on to say, "There are no greater mysteries in the Christian's creed, than in your own. You believe, and must believe many things you cannot comprehend. It will therefore follow, if mysteries in the creed of the Christian must prove it not true; those contained in that of the deist, must be of equal weight to prove that untrue. The method which you therefore take, to disprove the truth of Christianity, will in all respects equally disprove your own: scepticism is therefore your only alternative."

I did not thank conscience for this troublesome lecture. And in order to prevent such remonstrances in future, I told her, all her reasonings were but the shackles of a superstitious and priestly education. I called her *priestridden*, *timid*, and *superstitious*; and as many other hard names as I could invent. Indeed as she had declared I must be either a Christian or a sceptic, I found an inclination to believe the latter; hoping thereby to make conscience entirely easy, or to join with me in the *labour* of doubting. I said, how can it be known there is any real existence? that my own is real? Or, that there are any real premises, from which good and certain conclusions may be drawn! All may be ideal! But it was evident on serious consideration, that a sceptic could not have one established principle, he must even *doubt* of his *doubts*. For if he says, that the truth of all propositions should be doubted, the proposition which affirms even this, must also be doubted. Because if he admits this as one evident truth, there may be also another, and many, which would overturn and

destroy the whole system. Consequently he must not only doubt the truth of all propositions; but even doubt of the truth and propriety, of doubting of the truth of all propositions. Nor was it less hard to believe, that a severe fit of the tooth-ache was *ideal*; or when an impudent wretch beat me, that it was all imaginary, and that I only imagined returning the blow. I therefore saw no way, in which justly to discredit my own existence; the things I saw, and those supported by credible historical authority. It became needful therefore to call in some other auxiliary; or fall for the want of assistance: just then I hit on a *lucky* subject, the discovery of which greatly delighted and strengthened me.—

Experimental religion is all an imagination; and it can be abundantly proved.

It does not appear, [said I] more difficult for a man to imagine himself a sinner; that his sins are pardoned; that he loves God; that God loves him; and to fancy himself happy from an imaginary prospect of heaven; than to imagine many other things. Men not only imagine themselves inspired; that they have visions and revelations; that they are Christians, when in the judgment of others and the bible itself, they are wild enthusiasts; and also seem happy in the possession of such a hope, and under its influence; but have even fancied their legs made of glass; that their head was too large to enter at a door of uncommon size; and fots have believed themselves heroes, and lunatics have fancied themselves kings. All this has been pronounced imaginary, by the sober part of the Christian community; and why have I not the same, or as good authority to pronounce the rest of the same nature! It is acknowledged by Christians and Christian ministers, that many have died in defence of antichristian principles, when at heart they had no Christian sentiment; and why may I not suppose that others might also die for their attachment to what is not true; and consequently imagination may be so strong as to lead to all these things without an *iota* of truth. And many who profess faith in Christ, call *those deluded* and

fanatics, who discover any warmth of affection in the Christian cause; and on the other hand, the zealous accuse those who oppose them, of pleasing themselves with a form, and denying the power of godliness. I said, both these cannot be right, one must be wrong, and how do I know but both are wrong. Each says the other is absolutely wrong, and in this they may be both right, however they may be otherwise in every thing beside.

By this time I began to think myself very safe and happy, under the belief that religion was wholly the effect of a strong imagination.—It cannot be denied, but the power of imagination is very extensive; and when allowed to act not only uncontrolled; but even pushed forward to its utmost bounds, by objects calculated to warm, strengthen and vivify it, it is not in the least strange, that those under its influence, should be affected by it, and feel all the wonderful things of which they speak.

I should have taken a very long and pleasing sleep in this wretched subterfuge, could I have persuaded conscience to a state of quietness. If at any time she seemed quiet, it was only to observe the method and course I was taking, that being informed she might the more powerfully and successfully attack me. It was so in the present case, and though I would gladly have had her silent, yet she went on to reason with me in the following manner.

“If there are some counterfeit Christians, it is no more a proof that all are so, than it proves that all the money issued from our mint is counterfeit, because some wretched men have been guilty of a breach of the law, in counterfeiting it. If some things are imaginary, it is no conclusive argument that others are not real. If a man were to take another to be his friend, when he was an enemy, it would not prove he had no friend, or that there were none capable of friendship. Suppose the fable of the dog swimming across the river with meat, were true; would it prove that no dog ever had a piece of meat, because he let go that which he had, under

the influence of *imagination*, that he saw another piece in the bottom of the river?"

"Nor will it prove that experimental religion is an imagination, because some have imagined that to belong to it, which is no part of it; and because others fancied they were possessed of it, when they were not. It will therefore follow, if there are a thousand proofs of the falsity of experimental religion, the objections you made above cannot be classed with, or reckoned a part of them.—It cannot be denied but some things embraced by deists are also imaginary; they cannot all be true. It cannot be true to say, the soul is immortal and that it will be annihilated: one or the other must be imaginary or false. And if because some professed Christians have imaginary notions, the conclusion must be, there are no truths in their creed; the conclusion must also be the same relative to deists, since it is undeniable, that they must have a mixture of imagination in the articles of their creed. On this principle of reasoning neither deism nor Christianity can be true: scepticism is therefore the only remaining retreat."

"It is not to be expected, nor proper that religion should eradicate the imagination from the mind. It has its uses in all stations and in all professions. The poets are allowed to possess it; and a proper indulgence of it is thought to be a great ornament to their composition: nor is it less ornamental in painting, and sculpture. It is the life of wonder and admiration; the leader of all new and useful enquiries; and in conjunction with reason, the inventor of many things, which serve the best purposes of civil life.—And why should Christians be denied the right use of it more than other men!—They use it aright, when it assists them warmly and devoutly to admire God in his works of creation, redemption and providence; when by warm meditation it pursues the plain path of evangelical truth; when it leads them warmly to feel the distresses of others; and when it does not invent any thing in addition to the word of God, or opposite to it."

"But if it should sometimes break over its bounds, it can be no proof that it is not useful within them; or

that religion is false. It would be bad logic to say, some astronomers have had wild and unfounded notions of our system; therefore neither they nor others have had any which are well founded. Yet the argument is as good as to say, some men have run wild on the subject of experimental religion; therefore all experimental religion is imaginary. Yet you know, that by this one argument some infidels attempt to overturn the whole fabrick of Christianity."

"And if the Christian religion is false, and deism true, how is it that the former, has reformed so many swearers, liars, drunkards, and other bad members of civil society; and caused them to become good members of a virtuous community; and that the latter has never had this effect in one instance; but on the contrary, has generally been effectual in promoting *licentiousness*; so that virtue has declined, and vice increased in all places, in the same proportion as the principles of true religion, or those of infidelity have influenced the minds of men. Thousands of pages of history sufficiently shew this; and if there is any dependence on the credibility of history, the truth of the observation cannot be denied. If deism be true, and Christianity false, it would therefore seem, that error is more powerful than truth, to reform vicious habits and make men virtuous."

"Those who are under the government of imagination, seldom imagine the same thing twice; nor are there scarcely two whose imaginations are alike. But on the subject of real, experimental religion men of all ages, countries, habits, manners and educations, have thought and spoken essentially the same things. They may have differed in some unessential circumstances and modes; but compare the experimental expressions of the most ancient scripture writers, with the most modern; and both with those of experimental men, down through all the succeeding ages, and you will find no material difference. And if a difference of opinion be admitted, it is to be only recollected, that it has been already proved, that a difference of opinion no more destroys Christianity than deism."

“ If the latter be true and the former false, how is it, that the disciples of one enjoy more happiness in life and death, than those of the other? Will error afford more support and comfort in the hour of affliction and death than truth? Happiness is accounted very desirable by all men, and all more or less, in some way, are engaged in the pursuit of it; and if christianity will give a larger share of it than deism; it must be a benevolent work to suppress the one and propagate the other. But as the deists do the reverse, they are one and all guilty of downright cruelty; even on supposition the Christian religion is false; and if it be true; no language can paint the cruelty and wickedness of their conduct.”

Here I would fain have had conscience silent; and left me to the enjoyment of my flesh-pleasing religion; but no persuasions could prevail. She must needs go on and tell me, of the terror and misery in which Voltaire and most other noted deists have died; and the calmness and submission, in which real Christians have departed this life. She went on to say, “ If deism should prove true in the end, and you should be a Christian in this life; you would eventually lose nothing. A virtuous life is by far the most peaceful; and though the Christian religion requires some self-denial and mortifications, which are unnecessary on supposition of the truth of deism; yet these are far less afflicting than the evils, often experienced by deistical libertines and men of sensual gratifications: nor does religion deny men the enjoyment of any thing worthy of a rational creature. Indeed the gratifications of those who style themselves men of pleasure, are often unworthy of a brute; and much more unworthy of those who possess rational powers. Consequently the Christian can suffer no loss; but if christianity should prove true, deists must suffer an infinite loss.”

By this time conscience grew very urgent and serious; and seemed almost as merciless as the thieves, who fell on the unhappy man journeying from Jerusalem to Jericho: I was stripped almost naked of the garments of infidel unbelief; and left half-dead with fear, that the

threatenings of the bible would be found true ; and was therefore under a fatal mistake. In this situation I thought sometimes of praying, and at others was quite offended with myself, for having no more courage and *philosophic* fortitude, than to listen to the terrors of an intimidated conscience, which had been made cowardly by a *superstitious education* ; and would never have spoken a word on the subject, had she not been *so* corrupted.

But the more I called the terrors and entreaties of conscience the *shackles of education* the more bold and remonstrant she became.—She added : “ Admitting that men would never have felt some things wrong, unless they had been *so* taught by the bible ; it will be an argument rather in favor of christianity than against it. It helps to prove the darkness and ignorance of the natural understanding ; and the necessity of its being taught in order to know the truth. The mind needs instruction in all other things ; and why must the gospel be spoken against, because it informs the understanding of good and evil ; and discovers some principles of both, which would never have been known without it ? It would be a perfect sophism to say, that the sciences are all false, or imaginary, because the knowledge of them has been communicated by instructors and books of instruction. Yet there is as much truth and propriety in the argument, as to say the Christian religion is false, or imaginary, because some of its doctrines and precepts have been imprinted on the mind by means of the bible : and yet you know, that this is the drift and force of the deistical argument.”

“ Infidels will acknowledge there are principles of virtue and vice ; things, which in themselves and relations are *right* and *wrong*. If they do not, why do they advocate any principles of law and government ? Why do they condemn theft, fraud and falsehood ; and approve of honesty and truth ? If men are brought up in ignorance of these, *so* that they neither know their existence nor dictates ; it will neither make them false nor imaginary, alter their nature, nor change the one into the other : virtue will be virtue still ; and

vice will be the same. Suppose then, some men are ignorant by nature and for want of education, of some of the precepts of the bible; it will not alter the nature and propriety of those precepts; if they were right before, they are now equally so, though concealed from this class of men: And if these precepts were written on the mind, by means of reading or hearing the scripture read, this will not alter the nature of them, so as to turn them into the *shackles* of a *superstitious education*; or make them *false* and *imaginary*. Truth is truth however it may be taught; and if men will take nothing for truth, but what is innate; they will not only be as *ignorant* as Hottentots, but as *inarticulate* as brutes. It must therefore be utterly wrong, to reject religious instruction under the false colour of its being the *shackles of education*. If undeniable proof is given, that the precepts of the bible are false, it must be drawn from some other source. For if men feel themselves under restraint by being taught those precepts, it no more proves those precepts are wrong, than the just laws of a free and equitable government are proved wrong, because men of rebellious inclinations feel themselves restrained, by being taught the law and penalty they are under, if they carry their inclinations into *actual* rebellion. If a restraint which comes by education, is it an evidence that the principles of that education are wrong; it will be the duty of every man to rebel against all principles received by education, in order to do right: If the principles so brought into the mind are wrong, it must be wrong to follow them; and consequently right to rebel against them. Therefore all scientific men, should rush into the darkness of wilful ignorance; informed men should rebel against all forms of state government; children against family government; truth should be disregarded; national and individual faith should be given up; and universal anarchy should be introduced. Nor can any deny these consequences, while they affirm the *restraints* of bible precepts false, because they have taken place in the mind, by our being educated in them."

"Suppose a particular nation ignorant of its being

an evil, murderously to take the life of a fellow creature; — would it not therefore be an evil? It must either be virtuous or vicious; there is no medium. There may be degrees both of vice and virtue; but there can be no half way line. Suppose this same nation should have a form of civil government introduced among them, which taught them that murder is an evil, and by this teaching they should feel a *restraint* on their consciences against the commission of murder; would it follow, that the principles of the restraint, and the restraint itself are wrong; and to be violated, because they came by education. It must be so, if the method is right, by which infidels argue against a Christian education.”

“ Besides, multitudes have been conscious of wrong, where the bible has never been seen or heard of; and where a Christian, or what you call a *superstitious education* never had the smallest influence. The most virtuous heathens believed many of the leading points of divine revelation. Socrates, Plato and others believed the immortality of the soul; future rewards and punishments; and the necessity of a virtuous life in order to be happy. Although they had some dark and confused notions, for the want of a direct revelation from God; yet they saw and maintained many of the essential truths of Christianity: and strongly lamented the want of a divine revelation, and hoped the time would come, when God would be so propitious to men, as to grant such a favor. If these great and leading articles of the Christian faith are not true, why have virtuous heathens, who have never been *shackled by a priestly education*, held them in common with the Christians.”

“ And it is no small argument in favor of Christianity, that those who reject its precious doctrines and precepts, are usually such, as live or wish to live voluptuous, sensual and brutish. Men must first wish to live like brutes, before they can bring themselves to believe they shall die like them. Such are well convinced, that as they conduct, they shall be the subjects of the dreadful penalty of God’s law, if the law and its penalty are true; and with a design to rid themselves

from their uneasy fears, they class themselves with the filthy swine, and the brutish dog, because they have an inclination to be sensual. They call their sensual inclination by the name of reason; and whatever clashes with it, they pronounce inconsistent with reason; and unworthy to be followed. And as repentance and faith, the love and worship of God, are opposite to their inclination, they do not hesitate to affirm, that these are unreasonable, and to be disregarded. If this subject be seriously examined it will be found, that deism always flows from an inclination, which is in itself brutish and sensual. If *inclination* is *reason*, and reason is to be our law, covenants and oaths, and virtue, and vice must be mere names. All this some of the *free-thinkers* and *libertines* of our age affirm; and by so doing affirm adultery, fornication, fraud, violence, theft, murder, and all other evils to be innocent and right; being authorised by the law of inclination, or what they call reason. But few perhaps would appear open advocates of this system; but many practice it, and none of them can deny it, unless they give up the method, by which they attempt to overturn the plan of Christian salvation."

"In whatever light therefore you view this subject, it will appear, that right and wrong do exist; and that every man has a consciousness of it more or less: nor is it any good objection to this principle, that it is, or may be strengthened by a proper education. And the calling it the shackles of education, is only the artful method of a sensual unbeliever, to hinder *me* from reproving, and to give full latitude to the leadings of a carnal inclination."

This last reasoning was so forcible and plain, I could not well deny it. Once more I began to feel, as if it were time to seek for a more perfect knowledge of the way of truth. It seemed dangerous to rest in such a state; and that it was my duty to look about me, and bestow on the subject of religion a more serious and impartial examination. Having for sometime neglected all kinds of worship, I resolved on the next Sabbath to attend at the house of God. The resolution was

put in practice ; and I went hoping for instruction, but was sadly disappointed.

The preacher told us that all things were *unconditionally* and *eternally* decreed ; that the insults and malice of the Jews towards Christ were so decreed ; that they fulfilled the decree of God ; but this did not free them from the blame : addressing the *elect* he said, this must be a *very comfortable doctrine*.

Out of this sermon I *twisted a new cord*, with which I bound conscience, and for a long time kept her in a state of confinement. I said if this sermon be Christianity, I will be a deist in spite of you. I can never believe, that God decreed the conduct of the Jews toward Christ ; that he *willed* the *accomplishment* of the decree ; and consequently *willed* their conduct ; and after all the Jews were as much to blame, as if they had acted freely. It was however pretended, that though they acted under the influence of an *immutable* and *irresistible decree*, they nevertheless had their choice and acted freely. But this appeared so much like the old proverb of Hopson's choice, *that or none* ; that I could as soon believe in the choice and freedom of a piece of clock-work ; or that a mill-wheel moves by free choice, when driven round by the impetuous force of water.

It was also pretended, that their criminality did not consist in the action which fulfilled the decree of God ; but in doing it on selfish principles, and in not intending to do his will. But it occurred to me, that their books, Catechism and Confession of faith said, God had *decreed all things* which come to pass ; consequently he must have decreed they should not intend to do his will. This act of intention therefore must be as much decreed, and as much according to the decree, as any other act ; and if other acts were according to the decrees of God, and those decrees according to his will, this must be equally so ; consequently their intending to oppose God, was doing what he had willed by his decree : and I could not tell, how it could be criminal to do the divine will.

I read also in the bible, that all who do the will of God are the brethren, sisters and mother of Christ. It

was likewise written, that Christ called some of the Jews the children of the devil. It was indeed very strange, how all could do the will of God by fulfilling his decrees; and yet some of them be children of the devil: unless obedience to God's will or decrees made them resemble the devil. Nor could I see but Christ must be brother to the devil's children, if all do the will of God by fulfilling his decrees, and if all who do his will are his brethren.—Yet they maintained that some would be eternally punished. But I could not forbear to ask, whether such were to be punished for nothing; or for doing as God had willed in his decrees? And whether if all men do the will of God, and all such are the brethren of Christ, and if some are finally punished, whether some of Christ's brethren will not be punished? It appeared to me, if doing his will is a crime which calls for eternal punishment; that men must resist his will in order to be eternally saved. For it was impossible to tell how that doing the divine will, could justly call for things so entirely opposite, as salvation and damnation.

In the course of my conversation from time to time, my *disputants* had observed the *ifs* and *ands* I had used respecting the bible; and began to suspect me a deist. They charged me with it, and strongly lamented over my unhappy state. I said, if *elected*, I am as happy and safe as you are; but if *reprobated*, why shew me more compassion than the God you worship! He never had any bowels of mercy toward me; but passed me and others by, with a *non electing decree*, long before we had existence. They thought such conversation approached very near blasphemy; and said it is the mark of a reprobate. I said, if a reprobate it was never in my power to help it; and if God has *passed me by*, with an eternal *non electing decree*, I ought not to be ashamed to shew the mark and seal which he has put upon me; unless I ought to be ashamed of the work of God. They wept, and I smiled, and so we parted.

By this time I was again pretty well confirmed in deism; and hoped conscience would let me rest in a state of undisturbed repose. I noticed in the mean

while, all who were inducted into deism, soon became *extremely well versed in philosophy*. It was my wish not to be a step behind them. All at once as though favoured with an extraordinary revelation, I grew up into all the wisdom of a very learned philosopher. Christians and divines could not stand before such learning and wisdom. I could even assign natural causes for all events. I said, when sulphur takes fire in the air, it makes lightning and thunder.—When water exhales from ponds and rivers, and falls back on the earth, it rains.—The sun stands still, and the earth revolves round the sun to make our winter and summer.—When the wind comes from the north, it comes from a cold place, and hence it is cold weather; and *vice versa* when it blows from the south.—God is the soul of the universe; he acts all things in all men; inspires and moves the great machine, and us as parts of it: therefore “whatever is, is right.”—Matter can think and reason, and the soul of man is nothing but an essential and subtle oil, impregnated with volatile salt.—I grew wiser and wiser every day; and could talk such learned and great words, that none but my *brother philosophers* could understand me. I discoursed on attraction and gravitation, densation, rarefaction, and exhalation; of projectile, centrifugal, and centripetal force, and many other such learned things!!!

But in the midst of my famous attainments, conscience must needs disturb me with her impertinent enquiries. It was in vain to attempt to put her off, she would be heard, and began as follows.

“Has your *philosophy* as many clear and solid proofs of its truth and excellency, as the bible you reject under pretence of the want of evidence? Suppose it true, is it as good and as well calculated for human happiness as the gospel? Is there any thing in the doctrine of second causes by which the first cause is necessarily excluded; or which any way opposes the gospel, when both are properly understood? Would you reject the gospel, if you were not conscious that your life is such, you must inevitably fall under the curse of its precepts? Would you wish to die like a brute, and be like one

after death, if you did not wish to live like one? Suppose you could resolve all events under second causes, would you wish to reject the first? i. e. be an atheist rather than a christian? Are there not many things, which can no more be accounted for on the principle of second causes, than the mysteries of the Christian religion can be explained, and brought down to a level with the human understanding? And is it wisdom to rest satisfied with a creed thus formed, when the Christian creed is rejected, with no greater difficulty attending it? It will be well to consider also, it is not in the least probable, that a righteous and all-seeing God will sit an idle spectator of the black and daring crimes of wretched and offending men, and never call them to an account. Virtuous heathens did not believe it, though not favored with the bible as you are; and if you had it not, there would be no just reason to conclude, that the great Creator has formed rational creatures, and yet takes no cognizance of their actions. But considering you have the bible, and so many undeniable proofs of its *authenticity*, there must be an *inconceivable hazard*, to rest your eternal *all* on the supposition of second causes, and so think of utterly excluding the gospel."

I was now under some fear, conscience would drive me from my beloved retreat, that my fame as a philosopher would be lost; and should be ridiculed by all those who had esteemed me as a *master* of deistical mysteries. My anger was kindled against my troublesome *bosom companion*, I sternly bid her hold her peace, and disturb me no more. Obedient to my command she retired like a faithful centinel, who had seen the enemy approaching and given the alarm; but was ordered off his post by the treacherous commander, who had basely determined to give it up into the hands of the enemy. To revenge the trouble she had given, I beat her unmercifully with what I called the absurdity of the doctrine taught me in my childhood; I stopped her mouth with the immorality of religious professors, blinded her with *mysteries*, clothed her in doubts and sceptical enquiries; bound her with unbelief; shamed

her with pride; and to complete her captivity and my own deistical liberty, I went as far in wickedness and youthful vanity, as my situation and circumstances would permit. Although I retained a regard for what was called sober truth, and endeavoured to avoid those evils, which by men were accounted disgraceful; yet loved, and as far as possible practiced the *fashionable* vices. Profane swearing and blaspheming the name by which Christians are called, were evils to which I was greatly addicted. At first conscience attempted to reprove and prevent me; but by often repeating the treatment above described, she submitted for some time, to allow me to enjoy my new religion undisturbed.

I could soon swear without remorse, join in what is *politely* called jesting (or what should rather be termed fashionable lying,) make myself merry with my gay companions; and sport with all sacred things with a freedom and dexterity uncommon to my years. I did not hesitate to call Christ an *impostor* and his religion a *delusion*. My mouth was ever full of scurrility against the person and character of Christ, his gospel and professed followers. Every professor of religion I called a hypocrite, and held it as a principle, that such shou'd be eyed with greater suspicion than any other men. It was my buiness to search out their faults and magnify them; to convert infirmities into *intentional* and *daring* sins; to increase the *mote* to a *mountain*; and where no evil was to be seen, to be jealous there was some at heart, though they were artful enough to conceal it. In short, I was like the character described by the prophet, who eat of the sins of God's people as they eat bread. I totally neglected the study of the scriptures, and grew passionately fond of reading *novels* and *romances*: In my view no book was so worthless as the bible. It was painful to hear it read, and if the name of Jesus was called by others in reading it, my heart rose in such contempt of it, I could hardly refrain from blaspheming. All kinds of worship were tedious and burdensome. If I sometimes went to publick worship, it was more to see and be seen, than any thing beside;

and that I might meet my merry companions, and make the intermissions, seasons of frolick and ridicule.

I began now to think myself certain of *happiness*;— in the high road thither, and almost ready to enter on the possession—I congratulated myself for my happy escape from the *shackles of a superstitious education*.—*Being let go I went to my own company*; expecting full cups of pleasure among my new fraternity. We tried the pleasures within our reach, but these soon cloyed the appetite, and left it sickly, faint, and distressed. No object attained afforded the wished for satisfaction; those at a distance promised much, but were sure to disappoint and distress me. They were like bubbles tinged with the colours of the rain-bow, which are no sooner touched, than they break and disappear. I was like the fish drawn from its native element, and cast on the dry earth; gasping and struggling in the agonies of death, amidst the surrounding air.

This lack of happiness however I imputed to the want of means, and lamented the being so destitute of worldly riches; which cut me off from that extensive circle of pleasure, and height of honor, which seemed necessary to the enjoyment of real happiness. On observing the exalted, and supposed happy situation of others, and comparing it with my own; envy tortured me; dishonesty tempted me; rage and despair assailed me; and I was miserably torn and tormented with the conflicting passions of the human breast.—*Could riches have been my lot, pleasure and honour should have united to turn this world into a Paradise.* I could hardly refrain from cursing God, for making such an unequal distribution of riches; and especially for having denied me the *means* of happiness. At times I doubted if there could be a God who governed the world; seeing a few only had been singled out and enriched with the means of happiness; and by far the greatest number left in narrow circumstances, or a state of penury.

While pouring forth bitter lamentations, and making myself extremely unhappy with the desire of riches, and the despair of obtaining them; was one day walking in a pleasant grove, and seeing a rich epicure with

whom I was well acquainted, and hearing him speak in an indistinct and low voice; drew a little nearer unperceived, with a full expectation of hearing him exult in the *happiness* he enjoyed. But to my utter astonishment and disappointment, he was lamenting in bitterness and tears his misery and *want* of happiness.

“I began my career (said he) when my mind was young and volatile; and nothing was denied me for the gratification of my pleasurable appetites. I feasted on the most delicious meats; drank the richest wine; listened to the most melodious and delightful music; gazed and feasted my appetite on the most exquisite beauties; gratified myself in all the fashionable amusements; —at theatres, assemblies and gambling tables; in the circle of the gay was made merry with diverting conversation: clad in the finest and richest apparel; had a splendid equipage; surrounded with numerous attendants and servants; and courted and flattered by the great. (See 2d. Chap. Eccl.). But from all these scenes I have retired with satiety and disgust. Had they been only as bubbles and shadows, they would have caused less unhappiness: but alas! they have proved like the piercings of a drawn sword; or the stinging of a venomous adder. My manner of life has filled my body with crude humors, and I already groan under several settled and chronic complaints: nor are my associates less afflicted. They are swollen by dropsies, crippled with gouts and rheumatisms, or corroded and eaten up alive, like an impious Herod. The very beasts are far happier than man. They are exposed to fewer diseases and less pain; they eat the simple food of nature without engendering a lengthy train of painful diseases; and then lie down in quietness with no tormenting fear of an endless hereafter.—O how much I dread lest this should be found a truth. I have long attempted to deny my immortality, and accountability to God; and have wished to die like a beast. But why these faculties so much superior to brutes, and so different from theirs, if I am to die and be like them? On this supposition they can answer no valuable end. They do little else but search after and open new scenes to

disappoint and pain me; or furnish such reflections of future accountability as are beyond the power of description. If immortality is not a principle of my nature, why do I find in myself and others, an almost constant rising wish, to perpetuate my name forever! Or how is it, that my contemplative faculties, can take an almost boundless range through the immensity of space! The distant sun or the far more distant stars are left far, far behind, while they wing their way and contemplate on other suns and other worlds! Can *mere clods of earth* have such boundless wishes, and such extensive range of thought! And will they all expire and go out in eternal darkness, with the dissolution of this short lived tenement of clay! Something within whispers immortality! The brutes seem satisfied with their meals; but something within me will never be satisfied! If I am only compounded of the elements, why am I not happy when nature is supplied! When my body is full fed and at perfect ease, something within me is still as unsatisfied as before, and cries aloud for happiness! The forebodings of judgment and future accountability, fill me with such terror and guilt, and so deeply seize me, that in the midst of my revels and wine, I am like trembling Belshazzar, when the hand writing appeared on the wall."

I could no longer forbear expressing my surprize, that he should appear so wretched and miserable, with the possession of such means of happiness. "Alas! (continued he) they are the occasions of misery; they have been perverted into a curse. What should have been given to the *poor* and *needy*, and have made the heart of the *widow* and *orphan* sing for joy, has been wickedly *consumed on my lusts*. The beggar has lain at my gate, and been refused the crumbs of my table; and my dogs as if more merciful than their master, have compassionately licked his painful and putrid wounds; while I was rioting in luxury, and have brought on the diseases, which follow intemperance, till my soul abhors delicious meats; and all the pleasures of sense; and all within me seems prepared only for painful sensibility."

It appears (said I) that you are only overtaken with a hypochondrical affection; and if you will but divert yourself with merry company, resist and throw off your present gloom, a cure will be speedily effected. The immortality of the soul is only a *fable* invented by designing *priests*, that they may *fleece* the ignorant and keep them in awe. For philosophers are universally agreed, that thinking and reasoning are the properties of matter; and, that this is fully proved, by observing that these faculties always decay with the body.

“So (replied he) I have endeavored to think; but am more and more dissatisfied with it. For I find many able philosophers both ancient and modern, heathen and Christian, have argued for immortality; and their arguments are so weighty and appear so reasonable, I know not any way to gainsay and resist them. It is certain thinking and reasoning are no discovered properties of matter; nor will it help the cause to say, matter has properties yet undiscovered, unless it can be proved, that some of those undiscovered properties are thought and reason. And there are no greater mysteries and difficulties in believing the immortality of the soul, than in believing mere matter can think and reason. A thousand experiments prove, that matter cannot move itself however organized, and *reason* being far more excellent than motion, there can be no just reasons to imagine it capable of one, while it is incapable of the other. Nor do the faculties always decay with the body, but often continue bright and active, when it lies nearly in ruins. Members have been taken from the body, and even part of the brain removed,* without destroying these faculties. And suppose they sometimes seem to decay, it is no more than what should be expected; seeing the soul while united with the body, has no other way to discover its powers and actions, than through the medium of the bodily organs: and if these are deranged or disordered, it will render imperfect and disordered the appearance

* See the 4th vol. of the Memoirs, of the Literary Philosophical Society of Manchester.—a paper by Dr. Ferriar.

of those powers and actions. Like a disordered flute though blowed in by the same artist, and in the same manner, yet affords a very imperfect and unharmonious sound, by reason of the derangement of its organical structure. When all these things are weighed, I am filled with fearful apprehensions of the truth of the scriptures: of all things, this is my greatest dread. I have labored to believe the whole is false; and at intervals have made myself easy with the belief; but in spite of every argument and effort, have been repeatedly alarmed, and should they prove true, am fully persuaded, my life has been such, I should fall under the weight and terror of all their dreadful denunciations."

I was indeed much disappointed, relative to the happiness which I had fancied, was enjoyed in the pleasures of sense. But after all believed it might be enjoyed in the possession of riches. It was not in my power to make the trial, nor did I know how to obtain the knowledge. My anxiety daily increased, and many ways were sought to learn the interesting secret. In deep study on the subject I was one day walking, and heard from a house at a little distance, a tone of lamentation and sorrow. I hastily entered, and saw a man apparently on the brink of the grave, and in the utmost agony of mind; and was amazed to hear him say—"When I set out in the world, it was with a fixed resolution to be rich. No method which could escape the eye of the law was left untried. I defrauded the poor of their right, and took every possible advantage of the needy. No toil or labor was spared. My wealth was soon greatly increased, and field added to field, and house to house, merchandize, gold and silver were multiplied. I often promised myself happiness by arriving at such and such possessions. But was always disappointed, and not only destitute of the promised enjoyment, but as anxious and distressed for more as ever.—My covetousness increased with my riches. The poor were turned away empty from my door, and I was deaf to the entreaties of the fatherless and the widow. I had such a fear of coming to want, as to deprive myself and family of the comforts of life:

my nights were sleepless, and days filled up with anxiety and distress. And now on the verge of eternity my frauds, injustice, violence, oppression, covetousness and love of money, stare me in the face and fill me with inexpressible terror. O that I was ever so in love with *gold*, as to neglect the worship of God in my house; that my children should have been *brought up* without prayer and the fear of God; that secret devotion should have been slighted; the word of God passed unheeded by; and all the concerns of my soul disregarded, for the perishing treasures of this world! I was unhappy in the possession of them; but now more so, when I see the vanity of them, and am called to leave them forever!"

You should (said I) have obtained your riches by honest industry; been kind to the poor; been frugal and temperate; enjoyed the good of your labors, and you would have been happy.—But the poor man could speak no more! A friend of his standing by, replied; "No, no, happiness does not flow from riches. My father left me a moderate fortune; since then my honest industry has been increasing it; and for some years I have been in (what are called) independant circumstances. Kindness to the poor and frugality have marked all my steps; but I am still unhappy. There is an aching void within, the world can never fill. When trials and troubles come upon me, I find the want of a proper temper of mind to meet them, and turn them to my own advantage. Death terrifies me; and when I think of leaving all which I hold dear, my best enjoyments are at once destroyed. And if the bible is true, I am unprepared for futurity; and yet am daily pursued with fear of its being true. There are so many evidences of its truth arising from its prophecies, miracles, pure morality; and the power it has had in reforming the vicious, and giving happiness to its believers in life and death, I know not how to gainsay them; though my inclinations have long led me to wish it false, and to treat it as such."

These things forcibly impressed my mind, and half persuaded me no longer to disbelieve. But as there was

one source of worldly happiness yet unexamined, I resolved to make some further discoveries, before I renounced a system, which was so agreeable to the propensity of my heart. The honor of the world therefore next demanded my attention. To make the desired discoveries, I had recourse to history. In turning over the pages of ancient and modern history, the picture of human honor and greatness, did not appear as fancy had drawn it in my own mind. It was apparent, those seated on thrones of power and honor, were subject to envy and detraction. The historic volumes of Assyria, Greece and Rome, give us the black and full-drawn picture of human misery and wretchedness; rather than any thing which deserves the name of happiness. The *honored* Alexander cries like a *puling child* for the conquest of another world. The famous Pompey is treacherously murdered on the Egyptian shores; and denied a peaceful grave.—From the highest pinnacles of honor many fell into the lowest state of infamy and disgrace. And the higher they rose in honor, the more certain they were to fall, and the more deep and aggravating their ruin.—An immortal Columbus must die in ignominy and chains. Multitudes who waded to the throne of honor through seas of blood, have paid the momentary enjoyment with the price of their own. Honor seems at best but a shadow, and dies with the opening day. For a while men of honor are flattered, which usually puffs them up with pride; and if they are able to retain their power, they often become oppressive and cruel, and are hated of all men; and if they lose their power, their former flatteries and pride only serve to make their loss the more intollerable.

Having now examined all the sources of worldly happiness, and found them dry and barren, my way was hedged up, and I was undetermined what course to take. I found myself in the midst of a wide world, with many wants and nothing to satisfy them; with many trials and no suitable temper to meet them; with many fears and nothing to allay them; with many wounds and nothing to heal them; and with many burdens and no one to bear them. Nor was I alone.

Others were in the same distress and uttered the same complaints.

In this state I often murmured against God, for creating creatures capable of such vast enjoyments, and denying them all means of happiness. As murmuring against God did not alleviate, but rather heightened my distress, I ventured on the *very confines* of atheism; and attempted to think it more consistent to believe there was no God, than, that any being of the nature and perfections which I had hitherto ascribed to God, could create beings only to be miserable. But reflecting on the order and harmony of the universe, and that *chance* had never produced these; or any thing either animate or inanimate; rational or irrational; that chance (if it existed) could not produce itself; and that other things could not be produced without a cause; it was too much to take such a leap into the darkness of chance and atheism, without at least as good evidence of the truth of them, as there was of the reverse. These dreams were therefore short, and followed by keen and distressing fears: I would have been any thing rather than a *rational* creature.

In the midst of these reflections I took up an old book, which had long lain by me unread, and met with the account of a man, who had been excessively rich; but was suddenly stripped of all his possessions;—of a numerous family of children; deprived of his health; and smitten with one of the most painful and loathsome diseases; and to compleat his misfortunes his wife turned against him, and bid him desert his only hope and refuge; and his intimate friends and advisers censured him, and labored to prove him a wicked man. But surrounded and pressed down with these troubles, he appeared perfectly calm and submissive. This seemed almost incredible, but I could not say, or prove it was not true. I conjectured he might have been a *philosopher*, and tried myself to be one. But my resolutions and *philosophy* gave me neither *patience* nor *contentment*. I was unhappy still. In this frame of mind I was travelling, and called in the dusk of the evening at a cottage for lodgings. Having obtained leave to stay, ask-

ed for some supper, but was told they had no kind of provisions to eat. It was a time of general scarcity and distress among the poor. The old man was just recovering from a dangerous illness. They had no one to care or provide for them; and yet they appeared cheerful and happy. When I arose in the morning from my hard and scanty couch, my feet were so swollen by travelling the day before, I could not put on my shoes. I bought a pair of *indian shoes*, paid for my lodging, and the *old woman* with a great deal of thankfulness spake of the care of God, in providing something to buy a little bread. Not understanding the language, I took my leave and departed. These things often passed my mind; and I was half convinced, there might be such a thing as *contentment*. Some years after, when I had learned the *way* of true *happiness* at the school of Christ, I called on them again, and having learned the same language, found out the interesting secret of their cheerfulness in poverty.

Some months after this a letter from a brother who lived at a distance, [and as I supposed had been as deistical as myself] informed me he had found the insufficiency and vanity of earthly enjoyments; and had been led to embrace the gospel as a system of truth, happiness, and salvation; and seriously advised me to do the same.

O how it pierced me! Must I own the christian religion true after all? And be saved by him whose name I have so often despised and blasphemed? Deism now appeared more doubtful than ever, and my fears of future accountability were greatly strengthened. I could but own, that vice and virtue were empty and unmeaning words, if there were no rewards and punishments in futurity. Because on earth the vicious are often prospered, and the virtuous afflicted; and the votaries of vice become the oppressors, and tormentors of the virtuous. "Do we not find, in the present state, the highest degree of goodness is, in some cases, attended with the greatest" *afflictions*. "So we see that virtue in the present life is not its own reward, which infers the necessity of a future reward in the life to come."

“Nor is the permission of persecution or tyranny, by which the best of mankind always suffer the most severely, while wickedness reigns triumphant, at all reconcilable with the goodness of the universal governor, upon any other footing but that of a future state,” in which the sufferings of the innocent shall be rewarded. “When an Alexander or a Cæsar is let loose upon his fellow-creatures, when he pours desolation like a deluge, over one side of the globe, and plunges one half of the human species into a sea of their own blood, what must be the whole amount of the calamity suffered by millions, involved in the various woes of war, of which the greater number must be of the tender sex, and helpless age! What must be the terror of those who dread the hour when the merciless savage, habituated to scenes of cruelty, will give orders to his hell-hounds, to begin the general massacre? What the carnage when it is begun? Men slaughtered in heaps in the streets and fields; women ravished and murdered before their husband’s faces; children dashed against the walls in the sight of their parents; cities wrapped in flames; the shouts of the conquerors; the groans of the dying; the ghastly visages of the dead; universal horror, misery and desolation. All to gain a spot of ground, an useless addition of revenue, or even the visionary satisfaction of a sounding name, to swell the pride of a wretched worm, who will himself quickly sink among the heaps his fury has made, himself a prey to the universal leveler of mankind. And what is all history full of, but such horrid scenes as these? Has not ambition or superstition set mankind, in all ages and nations, in arms one against another, turned this world into a general shambles, and fattened every soil with slaughtered thousands?”

“The blood thirsty inquisitor, who has grown grey in the service of the Mother of abominations, who has long made it his boast, that none of her priests has brought so many victims to her horrid altars as himself; the venerable butcher sits on his bench. The helpless innocent is brought bound from his dungeon, where no voice of comfort is heard, no friendly eye glances

compassion, where damp and stench, perpetual darkness and horrid silence reign, except when broken by the echo of his groans; Where months and years have been languished out in want, of all that nature requires; an outcast from family, from friends, from ease and affluence, and a pleasant habitation, from the blessed light of the world. He kneels; he weeps; he begs for pity. He sues for mercy by the love of God, and by the bowels of humanity. Already cruelly exercised by torture, nature shudders at the thought of repeating the dreadful sufferings, under which he had almost sunk before. He protests his innocence. He calls heaven to witness for him; and implores the divine power to touch the flinty heart, which all his cries and tears could not move. The unfeeling monster talks of heresy, and profanation of his cursed superstition. His furious zeal for priestly power, and worldly church, stops his ear against the melting voice of a fellow creature prostrate at his feet. And the terror necessary to be kept up among the blind votaries, renders cruelty a proper instrument of religious slavery. The dumb executioners strip him of his rags;—the bloody whip and hissing pincers tear the quivering flesh from the bones;—the ropes are extended; the wheels are driven round;—the pulleys rise him to the roof; the sinews crack; the joints are torn asunder; the pavement swims in blood; and the hardened minister of infernal fury sits unmoved. His heart has long been steeled against compassion. He listens to the groans, he views the strong convulsive pangs, when nature shrinks and struggles, and agonizing pain rages in every pore.

He counts the heart-rending shrieks of a fellow-creature in torment, and enjoys his anguish with the calmness of one who views a philosophical entertainment! The wretched victim expires before him. He feels no movement but of vexation, at being deprived of his prey before he had sufficiently glutted his fury. He rises; no thunder roars; no lightning blasts him. He goes on to fill up the measure of his wickedness, he lives out his days in luxury; goes down to the grave

gorged with the blood of the innocent; nor does the earth cast up his carcase."

Can any one think such scenes would be suffered to be acted in a world, at the head of which sits enthroned in supreme majesty, a Being of infinite goodness and perfect justice, who has only to give his word, and such monsters would be instantly driven by his thunder to the centre; can any one think that such proceedings would be suffered to pass unpunished, if there was not a life to come, a day appointed for rewarding every man according to his works?"

These and many like reflections came home with power to my heart. It was difficult to refuse assent; and terrible to think of yielding. In this state of distress I laid hold on a book called "The Age of Reason," hoping to find something to remove my objections and quiet my fears: but was greatly disappointed. It was so scurrilous, ignorant and contradictory; that it rather led me to believe, than doubt the truth of scripture. One concession of the author seemed enough to undermine and destroy his whole scheme of argument; he confessed Christ was a moral man. If so, he was a man of truth; for lying is one of the most disgraceful breaches of morality. And if he spake true, he was really the Son of God, and what he spake was divine revelation. For he claimed this character to himself, and to what he spake. It was therefore certain, the author must either retract the character he had given Christ, call and prove him immoral, or renounce his *bombast* against the bible, and own it the written word of God. After carefully reading it, I laid it by, with a resolution once more to read the bible impartially, and with serious care. When this was done, many objections and supposed contradictions disappeared. And, although every thing at first did not look quite plain: yet it gradually grew more clear; and even at that time was led rather to suspect my own want of accuracy and penetration, than the truth and consistency of the writers.

A sermon I heard about this time against deism; and a second letter from my brother, increased my convic-

tion of the sophistry of deism, and of the truth of the gospel. I had surrounded and fortified myself with a variety of objections; but now thought it time to look over and examine them. That this might be done with more satisfaction to myself, I considered them one by one; carefully observing the strength of the cause on both sides. When this was done, I could no longer make deism a place of retreat.

In the mean while I reflected, and reasoned as follows.

From my first entrance on a deistical course, it had been a favorite opinion, that the book of creation was every way sufficient to afford men all necessary knowledge of the Deity, and all other points connected with their happiness, and that the *light of reason* was sufficient, to enable them to read it understandingly.

On carefully examining this source of argument, I saw no reason to contradict the apostle, where he affirms *the eternal power and God-head of the Creator are clearly seen in the things created*; yet saw the necessity and utility of an *immediate* revelation from God. For before the gospel was published, all was doubt and uncertainty in the heathen world. The best and most enlightened of them were involved in doubts respecting many things, which even they thought necessary to be known, and which the gospel now reveals. If this were the state of the most enlightened, what doubts and uncertainty must have *hovered* over the minds of the vulgar! And if we have the united judgment of the most enlightened and virtuous heathens, of the importance of an immediate revelation from God; and if that book which claims to be such a revelation, does reveal the very subjects they so strongly wished to be assured of, it must be a strong evidence in favor of the utility of it, and that it is from God.

There notions of morality were very dark, confused, contradictory, and inconsistent. Many of them "called evil good, and good evil; they put darkness for light, and light for darkness. And what of moral duty they did know, they had not power to enforce it on the

common people, who in those times, were extremely ignorant."

"That all virtue consisted in pleasure; that it was perfectly right for men to gratify every inclination and passion of their souls and bodies, was the doctrine of Epicurus and his disciples. And, hence in the opinion of these moralists, revenge, selfishness, intemperance, and debauchery were no crimes; for, by indulging themselves in these things, they only gratified their inclinations, and enjoyed the pleasures for which they were made."

Freethinking, and *freeacting libertines* may be pleased with such a system of morality. Yet no man who compares the unhappy state of things which existed where those doctrines prevailed, with the state of those nations where the gospel had its influence; [if he has not given himself up to brutish insensibility,] but must confess those systems false; and the necessity and utility of a revealed system of morality.

And the doctrines of Zeno the celebrated founder of the *Stoic Philosophy*, if examined it will be found little better. "They taught," "that a wise man ought never to be influenced by favors, nor ever to pardon an offence; that it is an argument of weakness and folly to be softened by sentiments of compassion; and that a truly manly character is equally inaccessible to entreaties and prayers."—But all these defects I found supplied by the gospel; and hence could but acknowledge the necessity and utility of it

I found that the book of creation did not teach repentance, or give any assurance of pardon on condition I did repent, but it was certain repentance was necessary for I had transgressed the *law of reason*: [to say nothing of that of the bible] and it was equally certain I could not be happy unforgiven.—Nor did the book of creation give any knowledge of a Redeemer. And yet an atonement had been supported by the practice of all nations and ages, in their sacrifices. It also appeared, one was absolutely needed. Suppose man had been only placed under what deists term the *law of reason*; that he was under obligation to his lawgiver perfectly to obey; and

that he had transgressed it; I could not see, that any after obedience or repentance on his part, could make amends for the transgression; or how he could be absolved and made happy without an atonement; unless I entirely renounced the dignity, propriety, and necessity of the law of reason. The book of creation was equally wanting in teaching the whole moral duty of man. "The best philosophers and moralists among the heathen, acknowledged their ignorance, in some points of duty. They were not even agreed among themselves, what, in many instances, was virtue and vice. Varro, an ancient philosopher, observes, that among the great men of the heathen world, there were not less than two hundred and eighty opinions concerning that one question, what was the chief good, or final happiness of man." Nor was the book of creation less defective in revealing the whole moral character of God. For the wise and penetrating philosophers of Greece and Rome, who had professed thoroughly to read it, made "Their Jupiter a debauchee; Venus a prostitute, Juno, a scold; Hercules, a swaggerer; Mars, a braggadocio; Neptune, a profane, Sea captain; and Bacchus, a drunkard. These are high charges, but they are supported by the history of the heathen gods, written by Homer, Virgil, and other ancient poets." Hence those well known lines of Mr. Pope.

*"Gods partial, changeful, passionate, unjust,
Whose attributes were rage, revenge, and lust;
Such as the souls of cowards might receive,
And formed like tyrants, tyrants would believe."*

Also to say the best, the boasted book of creation left the doctrine of immortality in a state of very great uncertainty. But on examining the bible, I found these important doctrines were all made sufficiently clear; and from hence saw, that whatever might be gained from the book of creation, it would not supercede the use of a revelation; but such a revelation was useful and necessary.

With me it had also been a favorite objection to the truth of the bible, that it represented God as having in

some instances commanded and patronized wars. I enquired the justice of such a proceeding; and "what innocent women and children, and smiling infants had done" to deserve such treatment.

Admitting the bible to be false, it was plain that wars, famine and pestilence, had taken place under the superintendance of God; and consequently he was as liable to the charge of injustice, on the supposed truth of deism as on that of Christianity. These same questions and arguments might be retorted on them, which they oppose to the gospel. For if it is really unjust for God to deal thus with his creatures; it is as unjust if the bible is false, as if it is true: unless they can prove, that the making these transactions the subject of history, so reversed their nature, as to make that wrong, which unrecorded would have been just and right. And if it is right for God to take the life of his creatures, it must be equally right for him to choose the time and manner of doing it. But if it is wrong, then he may as fitly be charged with injustice, when men die with disease or old age. They must therefore deny the principle or renounce the charge brought against the gospel; and if they own the principle, they must also own the right of God to choose the time and manner of executing it; by which they yield the point.

About this time I read Newton on the prophecies. It did much toward convincing me of their truth. It was evident many of the predictions had been fulfilled. No one was more conspicuous than that concerning the dispersion of the Jews, recorded in the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy. Those too concerning the cities of Babylon and Jerusalem, were clear and undeniable. I was also struck with the truth of prophecy, by comparing those of the old testament, concerning Christ, with their exact accomplishment in the new.

As it respects the first of these prophecies here named, it must be evident to every impartial enquirer after truth, if Moses had lived in the present age, he could not give a more exact history of the Jews, than he did in that prophecy. When I was *formerly* convinced by the evidence which arose from prophecy, I had joined the

opinion of the unbelieving Porphyry, and labored with him to believe, that what was called the prediction of the event, was not so, but written after the event took place. But this I was not then able to prove; nor had any one done it, who had made the infidel assertion. If the thing asserted had been true, it certainly admitted of proof; for those who wished to believe it, would as certainly have proved it, had it been in their power. But as none of them had done more than to assert, what they had not even attempted to support by good evidence, I justly concluded they were destitute of that evidence, and consequently now believed the prophecies possessed the character given them by the bible.

After the most serious investigation of the subject, I could find no method by which it could even be made probable, nor yet possible, to invent and spread among mankind a set of books, which contained, what they claimed to be predictions of future events; and make those among whom they were spread, believe, that they were predictions, when it was notorious that those very events had taken place. And when these same books also, claimed the character of the standing law of the nation; and affirmed they had all along possessed, known, and been governed by them; and appealed to their knowledge for the truth of standing monuments, and the observance of institutions in memory of events; and yet impose on their understandings, so as to cause them to be received as genuine and authentic records, when they had never seen or heard of such predictions till after the events; had never known and been governed by such Laws; and had never seen such monuments, or observed such institutions. It required *more faith* to believe all this, than to believe the truth of prophecy; and consequently the truth of the gospel. As much as I had ridiculed miracles, I found myself obliged to believe a greater miracle than any recorded in the bible, if I continued to believe all the above absurdities, in order to reject the truth of prophecy. And as much as I had charged Christians with credulity, weakness and ignorance; it was now evident who had been the greatest votary to credulity. I could by no means con-

sent to believe myself capable of being so imposed on, as thousands must have been if prophecy were not true. And it appeared too symptomatic of a vain and foolish mind, to arrogate more discernment, than all those who lived at the time and place when these things were introduced into the world, and could and would have detected them had they been false. Nor were there any to be found among the *whole generation of infidels*, who were willing to confess themselves undiscerning enough, to be thus imposed on: and yet they had the *laughable vanity* of pretending an ability to discover many hundred years afterward, what thousands of the most learned and wise could not do, at the very time and place when the things transpired.

These are but a summary of the views and arguments, which then occupied my mind. They wrought conviction, and led me to examine the miracles recorded in scripture, which had been treated with as much contempt as prophecy.

It was apparent, many of them were performed in publick, before wise and ignorant; friends and foes; many of whom wished and labored to prove them false. They had penetration enough to have done it, had they been so. But they were never able to do it; otherwise they would have charged the imposture on the apostles, and put a stop at once to the spread of error, instead of threatening, imprisoning, beating, and killing them. It is a sure sign men have nothing better, when they lay hold on such methods of violence. But had these miracles been a cheat, they could have had something better; and one undeniable evidence that they were impostures, would have outweighed all their insults and rage. But we have not a single sentence either from sacred or profane history, which proves even in the most indirect manner, that these miracles were ever discovered to be a fraud. And who can be exculpated from the charge of vanity, if he pretends at this time and place, to know more of the subject, than the multitudes who heard, saw, felt, and enquired for themselves? If they bore the inspection of proud and learned philosophers, insidious and jealous priests, who were present

to examine with a *jaundiced* eye, and with no other design than to prove them false; who shall have the *presumptuous vanity*, to pretend to more wisdom than all of them, and pronounce them *juggle* and *imposture*, when those who were present, were obliged to confess a notable work had been done, and to prevent its further influence, forbade the apostles to speak any more in the name of Christ.

Nor is it a trifling evidence in favor of gospel miracles, that they were not pretended to be wrought to satisfy the purposes of private ambition; or to promote an individual and selfish interest; but to establish a *system of good will towards all men*; and many of them exerted their benevolence not only on the souls, but also on the bodies of men. It is too evident to be denied, that Christ nor his apostles never gained, or proposed to gain to themselves any temporal advantage by their miracles and preaching. But the reverse is evident. Consequently benevolence must have been their foundation. And if theirs are compared with the pretended miracles of others, it will be found not only that the latter have been often proved to be frauds; but that they are wholly wanting in the benevolence, which give those of Moses, Christ, and his apostles the manifest stamp of divinity. If what is here said is therefore carefully considered, and properly traced into all its parts, it will deprive deists of the advantage they have unjustly taken, of attempting to invalidate the miracles of scripture, by opposing to them the cheats of impostors.

I went on next to examine the qualifications and credibility of the gospel witnesses. After the most serious enquiry the following things were apparent. Their number was sufficient to establish any fact.—They could not be *knaves*, for according to the known custom of such, they neither could nor did propose to themselves, either the pleasures, riches, or honors of the world; but sat out and continued under the certain expectation of the reverse.—They could not be *insane*, for they reasoned and conducted at all times like men in the right use of their senses.—They could not be *fools*,

for they always spake like men of wisdom; confounded and put to silence philosophers and priests.—They could not be *deceived*, for they testified what they had seen and heard. And nothing could be produced to prove them not as capable of rightly judging from objects of sense as any other men.—It could not be said they were *credulous*; for there is much evidence of the contrary.—They went forth against the power of the Jews and Gentiles; against confirmed habits; deep rooted prejudices; interested and prevailing customs; national laws and edicts; jealous kings and civil magistrates; and a rabble of brutish men, set on by interested priests and wicked philosophers: yet they triumphed over all; over death and the fear of dying; and with an unexampled patience in all their sufferings, carried their victorious gospel into all the world. If they were not engaged in the cause of truth, what reason can be given, why a *few* should gain such an exalted triumph over *thousands*; the *illiterate* triumph over the *learned*; *weakness* rise superior to *strength*, and the worst of hypocrites; the most raving mad-men; or the most downright fools, should nevertheless discover more pure honesty and integrity, more regularity and calmness, or more wisdom and prudence than all other men!

Their enemies put them to death under various pretences; but they never pretended the discovery of fraud and artifice in the religion they propagated. Authors sacred and profane bear a noble testimony to their honesty, patience, intrepidity, and zeal. Even a persecuting Pliny when addressing the Roman Emperor for instructions relative to persecuting the Christians, confessed them *strong* in their attachment to Christ; *honest* towards all men; and regular in their lives; and, that they had so *increased*, that the heathen temples were nearly deserted, and scarcely a victim was brought for sacrifice. He did not pretend they were rebellious, or immoral; but the substance of the charge was, *they were Christians*.

Many such testimonies might be collected, even from enemies, to prove that the first propagators of Christian-

ity and their immediate successors were well qualified to testify the truth.—And what is also very remarkable, those who had been let into all the secrets of Christianity, and afterward became its enemies, were never able to tell of any fraud; which they might, and would have done, had there been any.

After having weighed the evidences for and against the gospel, I did not hesitate to say, it stood established on as clear evidence as any subject, which was incapable of mathematical demonstration. The witnesses were not wanting in number. They appeared fully acquainted with their subject; and discovered no doubt of it. They were bold and uniform in their testimony; and have transmitted it down to us with so many marks of truth, and so well guarded against fraud, that we have no more reason to doubt it, than we have to doubt every thing we do not see and hear. And it is to be seriously questioned, whether there is any other history when impartially examined, which will be found to possess so many marks of truth as the gospel history. If such testimony is to be rejected, and nothing received as credible and certain, but what we see and hear, there cannot be a judicial court in the world; unless the Judge can be his own eye and ear witness. There can be no *faith in covenants*, unless we can see them *subscribed and Sealed*. There can be no *faith in history*, unless we can see and hear all it relates. Nor can we *trust the honesty* of a wife or friend, beyond our sight and hearing. If there is any good reason why this train of evil should not exist, to the entire destruction of all good society, there must be the same reason, why we should receive as valid the testimony of the gospel. If not, the world must inevitably be in a state of *complete anarchy*;—every one must be suspicious of another; suspect him a *hypocrite* and *enemy*; unless he can see all he thinks and does; and hear all he says.

It was now too evident to be denied, that I must either be a sceptic or a Christian. For if the truth of the gospel was to be rejected for the want of evidence, nothing could be certain which depended on *moral evidence*. It had formerly been my method to ask

Christians how they knew the truth of the gospel. They replied, "Because of such and such evidence." But how do you know that evidence to be good? "On account of such and such proofs." But how do you know the truth and goodness of those proofs?—By this method of running them from one question to another some of them seemed quite confused. But I now saw they might with equal propriety have been retorted on myself; and have been every way as powerful to destroy the truth of deism. This method of reasoning though commonly practiced by deists, does not in the least establish their cause; but inevitably lands them in scepticism. For there could be no evidence of deism, or mark of its truth produced for the support of any proposition, but might be questioned and doubted in the same manner, and with the same degree of propriety; consequently, we must doubt not only of the certainty and power of our own senses, but the senses of all men.

I had formerly sported with the law of Christ; as weak, unjust and contradictory. But now saw, whatever the legislatures of Greece and Rome might boast of; or however pure and equal their laws might have been; they could not exceed, nor even equal the law of Christ; which enjoined hospitality to strangers, kindness to the poor, honesty, justice, and equity toward all men. Nor can it be any *objection*, that the Jews were sometimes commanded to go to war with their enemies; if we consider, that these commands were *occasional* and under *special circumstances*, and did not enter into the code of their standing law; that they were a nation as well as a church; and as such were concerned to maintain the dignity of the nation: if we also consider, when Christ *separated church and state*, he repealed the practice, *blessed the peace makers*, and commanded *as much as possible to live in peace with all men*.

Deists believe it may be right to go to war; and most of them believe in the doctrine of *necessity* or *fate*. As they deny divine revelation, they suppose war to be right without one; and it is incumbent on them to prove, that such a revelation changes the nature of

the thing, and makes that wrong, which otherwise would be right. And while they believe the doctrine of fate, they must own, if it is consistent with God to decree war, and by *necessity* carry that decree into execution; the commanding of war on certain occasions is equally consistent; unless they can prove, that such an agency in making and executing decrees, has not as near a connection with the divine character, as the commanding of the same things. As this seems to be impossible, the law of Christ will therefore stand unimpeachable in spite of an infidel world.

Like the fraternity to which I had some years belonged, I had decried the morality of the bible, and lavished my encomiums on that of Seneca and some other heathen philosophers. It could not now be denied, but these writers had some merit, considering the darkness of their dispensation; but I was now well convinced, that for pure morality the bible as much exceeded their writings, as the light of the mid-day sun exceeds that of a twinkling star. Whoever impartially reads the 12th chapter of the epistle to the Romans, will perceive more pure and genuine morality crowded into its narrow compass, than can be found in all the heathen moralists put together. The whole world may be safely defied, to produce from all the volumes of heathen antiquity, so many excellent precepts of the love of God; the forgiveness of injuries; good will to enemies; and a spirit of universal philanthropy.

For some years it had been a maxim with me, not only that the book of creation was abundantly sufficient to reveal the whole character of God; but, that the bible represented his character in a very inconsistent light. But now I found it necessary to alter my opinion. It was evident, many expressions relative to his character were spoken in *allusion* to the ancient use of the *hieroglyphics*; and when properly understood, will affect the mind with a deep sense of their beauty and consistency. Consequently the difficulty had not existed in the absurdity of the expressions and figures used by the inspired writers; but in my ignorance of

them. It was also plain, that instead of those having a more consistent idea of the divine Being, who had only studied the book of creation; than what was given of him in the bible; that the modern deists had drawn their more consistent notions of God and morality chiefly from it. The dark and confused notions of their predecessors had been held and propagated, till the gospel was generally preached, or bible spread among mankind, and from that time it appeared they had improved the *letter* of their system. This was evident not only from the time they began to improve, but from their *phraseology*. Consequently it was too clear to admit of denial, that they were indebted to a book which they held in great contempt, for all they knew more, than had been taught by the heathen world.

The *doctrine of necessity* had been the *soul* of my system, and *only foundation* of my hope. But having found that wrong actions were more or less accompanied with guilt, I was led thereby first to doubt the truth of the doctrine, and at last my guilt contributed much towards causing me to renounce it as indefensible. It was hard to believe, guilt would accompany those actions, which flow from necessity. As this was the only proper foundation of my deistical superstructure, I saw the building must be deserted if the foundation was removed. When all these circumstances with some others were seriously weighed, I resolved to abandon deism, and was deeply convinced of the truth of Christianity.

But here a new scene of difficulty opened. I found myself surrounded by an ensnaring world, soliciting associates; filled with a fear of their displeasure; and a shame to own I had been mistaken, though I was now convinced, that the only way of wisdom and happiness was the way of the gospel, which had so long been despised. At times I was in great distress for past folly, made resolutions to reform, but broke them by joining in vanity with my companions, and thereby laid the foundation for new and more bitter reflections. After many such resolutions had been made and broken, I

feared to make others, lest they should be treated in the same manner. It sometimes appeared like presumption to ask God for mercy; and so neglected it, till fear and despair drove me to confess my sin, and ask his grace.

In the midst of these difficulties I thought of a scheme, which exceedingly pleased me.—I will propose forming a *moral society*, and become a member. We will regulate ourselves by the rules of outward morality. We will meet and have *moral lectures* for instruction, and to stir up our minds to *liberality* to the poor, to *temperance, honesty* and *frugality*. By these means I thought to free myself from the reproach of being called a Christian; and yet practice many Christian duties, which would answer the same purpose. Though conscience was not perfectly satisfied, it appeared so much preferable to deism, she half consented to the plan.

But I soon found such schemes of morality were but a sandy foundation; they did not change the temper of the heart; or free from impatience in trouble; anger and revenge under injuries; nor even afford strength to fulfill my own prescribed rules of morality. The scriptures also taught, such as were ashamed to confess Christ before men, he would not confess as his before the Father in the day of final judgment. They also taught, prayers, and forms, and outward morality, would not give true happiness; and fit the soul for heaven, without the *principle of Christianity* or divine love implanted in the heart, so as to renew its tempers, and lay a proper foundation for *good works*.

I now resolved to seek for this change, but to keep it secret, trying to believe one might be as good a Christian, and say nothing of it, as to be often telling it to others. But it was not long before this appeared impossible. It must be manifested either by words or actions; [and ought to be by both] or there would be no difference between my present and former character. But it was certain I had no right to lay claim to a Christian character, without a great difference from what I had been.—*This is no doubt a true picture of many!*

I next thought if my associates and acquaintance would embrace and profess religion, it would be my greatest joy to join them. But to be alone, and singular, was too much to undertake and endure. Though resolved to die the death of the righteous; I was half determined to put off a preparation for death till a more *convenient season*; hoping the time would come, when it would not cost me my *good name*, and draw on me the reproach of others. But the uncertainty and shortness of human life; the consideration that God had said his *Spirit should not always strive with man*: and the certainty, fear and dread of a future judgment greatly afflicted me. Thus halting between two opinions, I began to enquire whether men might not be saved without such strictness of piety in heart and life. These enquiries led me to think on *universalism*, and to hope it would answer my purpose. I reasoned thus: If this can be made consistent with the gospel, there will be no need of that self-denial, and bearing the cross, which I have before thought necessary.—But the amusements of life; and the common foibles of men may at least be innocently indulged. Christ having died for all, he has made their salvation *unconditionally* sure. He has *fulfilled all law*, and satisfied the *penalty* of all law for them; so that they have nothing to do with the requirements; and as little to tear from the threatenings. The promises are all *unconditional*; and God will irresistibly apply and fulfill them in his own time. seeking will therefore avail nothing. I had many other reasonings on the subject; too numerous to mention here.—They gave a momentary ease to my troubled spirit. But it was not long before my distress so increased, as to lead me seriously to examine the subject, which drew forth the following reflections and conclusion.

Universalism must stand or fall with the doctrine of *universal* and *irresistible* decrees. That this is the foundation of the system, is evident from the writings of Huntington and other writers of the same faith. It has been already proved, that the bible and such a predestination will never unite. Because it makes the

laws and decrees of God clash with each other; and represents him as willing one thing in his commands, and the opposite in his decrees. And as this same doctrine affords the premises from which the conclusion of universal salvation is drawn; the premises being removed, the conclusion must fail. And as this is the rule by which all the scriptures are explained, which are used to build up and support this system; since the rule is found false, this method of explaining and applying scripture must fail; and with it the system it is intended to support.

And because Christ died for all, it will not necessarily follow that all must be saved. For the scripture speaks of some who perish, for whom Christ died; and of others who bring on themselves swift destruction, by denying the Lord who bought them; and God reserves the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished; and that all whose names are not found written in the Lamb's book of life at the final judgment, are to be cast into the lake of fire. Which expressions of scripture do not appear true on the supposition that all must necessarily be saved; and that there is no future punishment.—*These things are said of the persons of men; not of their sinful characters.* For they can agree with nothing but with their persons, as connected with their characters: as it would be absurd to suppose pride, unbelief, hatred, malice, revenge, theft, adultery, murder and other evils; are threatened and punished, instead of the persons who are expressly meant in the threatening.

It also confounds redemption by price with redemption by power. All are redeemed by price, but the bible represents many as *servants* and *slaves* of sin and Satan, and as *captives* and *prisoners*; which could not be true, if there were not a difference between redemption by price and redemption by power. If there be such a difference, the promises must be fulfilled, and the atonement applied by a power men cannot resist; or it does not necessarily follow, that all must be saved because Christ died for all.

But the scriptures do not afford evidence of such an

irresistible application. On the contrary they affirm of some, that they had *resisted* the Holy Ghost; of others, that they had *rejected* the *counsel* of God against themselves; and of others, that they had done *despite* to the Spirit of grace, and counted the blood of the covenant wherewith they had been sanctified an unholy thing.

The Jews *resisted* the *will* of Christ, and were not gathered or *redeemed by power*, when he would have gathered or redeemed them. St. Paul exhorts not to grieve and quench the spirit. And of some he says their end is destruction. All these and many more must not only be destitute of meaning, but of truth; if the Holy Ghost cannot be resisted and grieved; if the counsel of God cannot be rejected or the will of Christ resisted; and if the end of all men will of necessity be salvation: therefore the atonement is not irresistibly applied.

By violently wresting the promises from the conditions, not only that which is holy is cast to dogs; but they are made to speak a language different from the intention of the inspired writers. Only take the conditions in connexion with the promises, and then there will be a perfect unison in the scripture, though the universality of the atonement, the strivings of the Spirit, and the invitations of the gospel are admitted as established truths. These can be made inconsistent in no other way, than by separating the promises from the conditions to which the Holy Ghost has joined them: even though we admit some men may reject the grace of God and perish. And the conditions so often occur, and are so closely joined with the promises, it seems difficult to understand, how any who believe or profess to believe in the bible, should attempt the separation of them.

They also take the prophetic promises, which were designed to be applied to what may be called the *millennial* state of the church, and without any warrant apply them to all ages. And because it is said, all shall then know the Lord, they infer it is so in all ages of the world; whereas many incontestible facts prove the reverse. They are much indebted to this class of scriptures for their support; but let them be properly un-

tierstood and applied, and they will afford nothing favorable to the scheme.

When I came to look over the argument, which said, Christ had *suffered* the *penalty*, and *fulfilled all law* for men, so that they had nothing to do with either, it seemed to be big with the following absurdities.

It confounds the Adamic with the Mediator's law. The Adamic had no Mediator, nor did it admit of, or require faith and repentance; but the Mediator's does both.—If what Huntington affirms of eternal damnation is true, Christ is now in hell.—When men are commanded to repent, believe, forsake sin, if it does not in fact, [as Huntington asserts] mean it as a duty to men; but that Christ is to do all this; it represents him as an impenitent, unbelieving sinner, and as repenting and believing in himself for the salvation of others. And when men are threatened with any kind of punishment, it means also that the punishment shall be inflicted on Christ, and not on those who are threatened. [See Huntington's works.]

I found it also argued, if some men resist the will of God, in order to do it, they must have more power than God. It was therefore inferred, that none could or did resist his will, but perfectly did it in all things. To which I found it difficult to concede without a satisfactory answer to the following queries and arguments.

Are we not to believe, when God gave his law he willed obedience to it? has not that law been transgressed? Is not a transgression of that law a resistance of the *will* of God, which *willed* obedience to it? It seemed these questions must be answered in the affirmative; or we must believe that God had a total indifference respecting obedience to his law, or that he willed the transgression of it. To answer them in the affirmative is resigning the point in dispute. To say he was *indifferent*, is to make him solemnly trifle with his creatures, by a great shew of threatened terror and promised goodness; and also to contradict the whole tenor of the bible. To say he *willed* the *transgression* of it, is to cast the blackest odium on the divine char-

acter; and is the same, as to say, when he commands repentance, faith, and love, he wills at the same time, that we should transgress those commands, by continuing in a state of impenitence, unbelief, and hatred to all that is good: and when he commands us not to steal, murder, and commit adultery, he does not intend what he commands, but *wills* we should do all he forbids. Moreover, Christ declared they resisted his will; it will therefore seem, that the conclusion is inevitable,—men can and do *resist* the will of God.

Nor will it follow from this conclusion, that men have more power than God. We have only to suppose; God attaches as much power to the exercise of his will, as is necessary for the accomplishment of his design. And as he governs men as *rational creatures, and not as machines*, he exercises his will toward them in a way consistent with his moral government; hence they are capable of resisting it, and of becoming rebellious subjects. And by thus *unnecessarily* resisting the *will and mercy* of God, they become *criminal and deserving* of punishment. Were it not so, they could neither be criminal, nor feel guilt. And if there is no criminality, there can be no need of a Saviour, or repentance and saving faith; consequently the book which declares these necessary is false, and *infidelity* must be true.

I observed also, that the apostles and other ministers of Christ had been, and were blest in reforming the hearts and lives of men. But I had never known or heard an instance of the kind by the propagators of this doctrine. Our Lord had said, *by their fruits ye shall know them*. I did not say they were not ministers of Christ; but only asked, if they are, where are their fruits?

These considerations induced me to abandon the thoughts of venturing my soul on this scheme. But as the doctrine of *hell-redemption* admitted the conditionality of the promise; and a limited future punishment, I had a faint hope, that by examination I should find it true; and by living *pretty moral* my punishment would be a *mere trifle*, and should thereby escape the heavy cross and reproach of being a downright holy

believer. Accordingly I next set myself to work, to build a hiding place in this doctrine.

I argued that Christ had died for all; that punishment is intended to reform the subject; that the terms used to express the duration of future punishment are used in a limited sense; and there are many scriptures, which seem to declare for a restoration from hell. These and several other points were enlarged upon in my meditations and arguments. My fears were somewhat quieted; and I strongly wished it might answer my purpose. But as light and truth still pursued me, and kept up within a tender sensibility of the importance of building my hope of heaven on a good foundation; and of having it like an anchor to the soul; I was led to the following observations.

I observed many who had long professed a strong establishment in the faith of *each system of universalism*; who renounced it on their dying beds, as unable to support them in the last great conflict. And those who had been in the belief of it, and were afterwards brought to the experience of grace, generally renounced it, as they did their sins: nor had I known an instance, in which any person by the experience of religion had been brought into the *belief* of either system. It was also obvious, that those warm in their first love did not believe it; and did not till they had declined in Spirit; and after embracing it generally declined in duty. Many after renouncing it, told me they had never enjoyed real ease of conscience in the belief of it; and the most they could say, they WISHED it might be true. These circumstances considerably affected my mind, and made me very suspicious that it would not do, to venture my soul on either scheme. But before I abandoned it altogether, I took a view of the scriptures, respecting the doctrine of a redemption from hell.

In order to support the doctrine of *hell-redemption*, it seemed needful to prove hell a state of *second probation*. Mr. W. has argued as if it were so, but has never proved it. This was the only necessary thing to be proved for the establishment of his system; and

I had like to have said, it is the only thing he has left unproved. It appeared there was nothing in scripture to prove it such a state; and much to oppose and disprove it. It cannot be imagined that a state without *hope*; a state of *darkness* without light; without *mercy*; and a state of *unmixed wrath*, can be a state of trial for heavenly rewards: and yet the bible represents this to be the state of the finally impenitent. Nor can it be true to say, those are on a state of trial for rewards, to whom *repentance is impossible*, and for whom there is *no pardon or sacrifice for sin*; and yet the bible represents this to be the state of some men. Nor is it true to say, *all punishment is designed to reform the subject*, and, from hence to conclude, that the punishment of hell is inflicted with this design. The punishment of the antediluvians, Sodomites, and others could not reform them. Neither can the hanging a murderer reform him; unless he is reformed while at the *rope's end*.

It is well known, that the words which we translate everlasting, &c. are the strongest and richest words in the Hebrew and Greek languages to express endless duration. They are applied to express the duration of God's existence; and of the happiness of the righteous; and must in these cases mean endless; unless the existence of God and the happiness of saints are of a limited duration. St. Luke speaking of the kingdom of Christ, (not his mediatorial kingdom) calls it *endless*; and Peter speaking of the same kingdom calls it *everlasting*. It is therefore evident, that the inspired writers understood the *native* and *proper* use of the word to be endless.

It is incontestible, that this as well as other words, may have both its *proper* and *BORROWED* use. I believe it will be found, that when the word is applied to the punishment of the wicked, it is not used in a *borrowed*, but in a *proper* sense; and consequently must mean endless. To prove this, let it be noticed, the word is used in the same verse to fix the duration of happiness; and must there be understood in its *proper* sense; and I know of no scriptural argument, which will authorize us to say, it is used in *different* and *opposite*

senses in the same verse: If not, it must be endless as applied to punishment.

When I had looked over the scriptures, which I had considered as favoring this sentiment; it was apparent, that many of them only related to earthly afflictions and captivities; and a providential deliverance from them: particularly 16th of Ezekiel. And others were figurative expressions, denoting their spiritually captive or fallen state; and deliverance by the gospel.—Nor could I see, how Christ could fulfill his promise to the penitent thief, and yet go to hell and preach to the damned; or how the state of the damned could be hopeless, without any light; and judgment without mercy; if he had been there, and assured them of redemption: and even admitting he had, it could have been of no avail to those, for whom there was no repentance or pardon.

But there is no need to descend into particulars; if hell is not a second state of probation, it will appear (said I) there is no redemption from it. Especially if it is noticed, that at the day of judgment Christ is to give up the *mediatorial kingdom*, and at the same time all whose names are not found written in the Lamb's book of life, will be cast into the lake of fire: Consequently if they are saved afterwards, it must be without a Mediator.

Having canvassed these sources of argument, I could not think of resting in them; but was more than ever convinced of the importance, of giving *diligence* to make my *calling* and *election* sure. In this frame of mind I went to publick worship; and was amazed, convicted, ashamed and distressed, when the preacher told me the thoughts of my heart, the words of my mouth, and the actions of my life. In my way home I had to pass through a solitary wood of some length, it was suitable for reflection, and led to a retrospect of my past life; to a resolution by grace to break off my sin; and to once more petition for God to cast a look of mercy on me, pardon my folly, and relieve my distress. The guilt and anguish of my bleeding and wounded spirit became intolerable. The sins of my whole life lay heavy upon me. It was painful to reflect on my pro-

famity and inattention to religion; but was most of all distressed with a sense of the past enmity of my heart against God; and for having *denied* the Lord who bought me with his blood. A discovery of mispent time, misimproved privileges, and the wilfully slighting the offers of *infinite* love, drew forth tears of anguish and sorrow. For some days I had a mixture of despair and hope; of hardness and stupidity; and a feeling, melting, tenderness of heart. At times my sins appeared too great and numerous to be forgiven; and I was so afflicted with a hard heart, and had so little humility and sorrow for sin; that I considered it, at times, an almost certain indication of being cast off forever. These were succeeded by short intervals of hope; which kept me from sinking in utter despair.

The next Lord's day I let my companions know my intention of seeking the pearl of great price. They held out the finger of scorn and derision; but God strengthened me by his grace, to be steadfast in the resolution. After returning from meeting burdened and sorrowful in spirit, I retired to a solitary grove for reflection and prayer; and seemingly resolved to weep my life away, unless I could find relief.—It was plain, God would have been just to have cast me off forever; and to have denied me all mercy. His goodness alone had spared me—disclaimed self-merit, and expectation of making the least atonement for past offences—unworthy, helpless, wretched, miserable, blind and naked was my character. God gave me a deep mourning for sin; and my very soul overflowed with sorrow and confession. My hope of pardon and plea for mercy were grounded on the merit of the great Redeemer. Mercy, was all my cry—I give myself away—take me for thine own, was the language of my sin-sick soul. While yet a great way off the Father of mercies saw and met me—changed my condition; and blest me with a calm repose. He brought me up out of the horrible pit and the miry clay, set my feet on a rock, established my goings and put a new song in my mouth even praise to God—I could sing with the Psalmist, “As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he separated my

sins from me. The temper of my heart was renewed; the objects of my affection changed, and I desired to live and die in the precious cause of Christ. The law of God appeared holy, just and good; and the promises beautiful and lovely. Sin looked odious and hateful; and holiness desirable and excellent. The duties of religion delightful and pleasant; and the pleasures of sin tasteless and insipid.

It appeared to me, there was a *fulness* in Christ; that ALL men were invited by his spirit and gospel; and if they perished, it must be for *rejecting* offered mercy. The importance of watchfulness and prayer was deeply engraven on my heart; and of standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ had made me free; and of being faithful until death, that I might receive the crown of life. An immortal thirst for holiness or a desire to love God with all my heart, was the prevailing bias of the mind. My prayer was in the language of the good Dr. Watts. "Nor let my heart, my hands, my head, offend against my God." And I was firmly persuaded, God would not inflame the heart with such desires, unless he was willing to grant the accomplishment of them.

But the temptations of Satan soon disturbed my peace. He sorely distressed me with the fear of being deceived, and of having taken up short of Christian experience: But could soon say with the Psalmist, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. This *poor man* cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles."

For some time my exercises were various.—I indeed found a great difference of temper, compared with the past; and that the trials of a Christian are more pleasant, than the deceitful and sinful pleasures of an unbeliever. But did not find that depth of piety, and that deep, pure and settled state of holiness, which was needful to keep the soul calm and even, surrounded as I was with the various trials of life. I also observed this to be the state with most other believers. These

discoveries led me to enquire the cause, and whether the gospel did not provide a sufficient remedy. In these enquiries it occurred to my mind, that it was written—"Be content with such things as ye have." "Godliness with contentment is great gain." "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am in therewith to be content." Was this the privilege of Paul only? Nay, God has said *he will withhold no good from those who walk uprightly*. And it was a good thing to have gospel contentment deeply wrought in the soul. The path where this temper is to be enjoyed, is the ONLY WAY OF HAPPINESS. And the reason why so few are *happy*, is because they do not walk in the ROAD, heaven has marked out for happiness. Most of the evils of human life are fancied; and the rest are made painful by an improper or *discontented* temper of mind.

Let us therefore enquire, whether there is not something in the nature of *contentment* which if really enjoyed, will smooth the PATH of life, convert afflictions into blessings, and afford a degree of human happiness, as a foretaste and delightful presage of consummate bliss!

It is to be feared, much more is said on contentment, than is experienced or properly understood. And it is equally to be feared, a stupid presumption often passes for this excellent temper. And we have reason to believe, many do not obtain it for the want of proper instruction; and others are likely to be forever disappointed, because they seek for it in a wrong manner and in wrong objects. Many try to substitute a *stoical apathy* for contentment; which not a little resembles an attempt, to change a human sensitive being into a block of marble. Surrounded and perplexed by these difficulties, very few seem to arrive at the possession of this happinessing temper; and still fewer possess it in that degree, which the gospel makes their privilege. It may be of importance therefore, to take a scriptural and experimental view of the subject. For which purpose let us here enter upon a description of Christian contentment

In a gospel sense the word signifies, being satisfied

and easy with the allotments of divine providence, to-
 der an assurance that they are all at the disposal of in-
 finite wisdom and goodness. It seems to unite in itself
 patience, submission, and resignation. Patience cheer-
 fully endures affliction without murmuring; resigna-
 tion gives up the reins of government into the hands
 of the infinite disposer of events; submission is obedient
 to all the dispensations of the divine government, and
 says "thy will be done," in prosperity and adversity.—
 It is a calm, even, easy temper of mind, not only under
 provocations and insults, but under the flatteries and
 carresses of the world. It originates in the love of God
 shed abroad in the heart, by the Holy Ghost given un-
 to believers. Though born of love, yet it feeds and
 strengthens all the evangelical tempers, begotten in the
 heart by regenerating grace. It is a medium temper,
 between an extreme and unbelieving anxiety; and a
 presumptuous, stoical stupidity. It is neither lost to
 refined sensibility; nor yet does it degenerate into fear
 and distrust of the divine *economy*. It neither expects
 divine providence to bestow its blessings without a
 proper use of means; nor yet, that the use of means
 will bring the blessings needed, unless they are succeed-
 ed and prospered by the unmerited goodness of divine
 providence. From this general definition the follow-
 ing conclusions will naturally flow.

Christian contentment is perfectly consistent with
 the most active performance of duty.

There are several branches of christian duty. We
 are to love God with all the heart: i. e. God is the
 supreme object of love; and all other beings or things
 (which are to be loved,) should be loved in reference
 to him. This love is to be expressed by attention to,
 and esteem for his word, ordinances, prayer, and all
 other commanded acts of worship.

We are to love our neighbor as ourselves: i. e. by
 supposing ourselves in the circumstance of our neighbor;
 and our neighbor in our own, then ask how we would
 wish to be treated by him in such a change of cir-
 cumstances; and when the matter is thus impartially
 determined, do the same to him.

Duty to ourselves is two-fold ; that which relates to the body, and, that which relates to the soul. To both of which we are to pay a strict attention.—Idleness can no more consist with contentment, than with that unbelieving anxiety, which keeps out of sight the providential care of God, and is always saying ; *what shall I eat and what shall I drink and wherewithal shall I be clothed ?* It therefore becomes the most devoted Christian, to provide things honest in the sight of all men, by pursuing some lawful employment. All proper means are to be used, and so used, as not to interfere with the more immediate duties of our holy religion. Time must be rightly divided, and every duty have its proper place. When one duty is made to hinder another, it ceases to be a duty. He who prays in secret when he should be at the publick worship of God, sins against, and injures his own soul. He who reads the bible, or takes up his time with any other religious duty, when he should be laboring for the support of himself and family, commits a great evil. Or he who spends his time in worldly pursuits, when he should be in secret, family, or publick worship, cuts himself off from gospel blessings by transgressing the order of God. In such a division and appropriation of our time, we are to be ardent in desire, warm in affection ; or of a steady and even temper ; according to the nature of the duty in which we are engaged. And all these are consistent with the purest *contentment*.

Of the truth of this proposition there can be no doubt, especially if we consider the scriptures afford many precepts and examples for its support. It is needless, and would be almost endless to transcribe the passages, which declare and urge these duties. It would not be transcribing a few verses or chapters only ; but almost the *entire bible*.

The examples of obedience set us by prophets and apostles, give light and energy to the subject ; and serve to convince us, that contentment is consistent with the most active obedience. If it were not so, these men who knew the will of God by inspiration, and who were themselves bright examples of content-

ment, never would have been so fervent and active in these duties. Nor would the scriptures have so often commended them; or even spoken in such terms of commendation, in describing their state at the final judgment. Nor dare we even believe, God would have so often and solemnly commanded them, and so severely threatened the disobedient; or made such glorious promises to the obedient. And to contradict the proposition, is to say, that prophets and apostles by their zeal and activity in the cause of God, discovered themselves to be a set of *wrestless* and *discontented* men; that they acted against the spirit of inspiration they were favored with; that all their commendations in scripture are false; that their *predicted commendation* which is to be fulfilled at the final judgment, is a deceitful representation; and that all the commands, threatenings, and promises of God on the subject of obedience, are a mere *farce* and *bug-bear*. As no one who believes the truth of the bible, will be *fool-hardy* enough to say this, (which an infidel would blush to speak,) the proposition must remain undeniable.

But when we have actively done the will of God, it is one of the most excellent properties of contentment, calmly to leave the event with him; with an assurance that he will cause all things to work together for good to them who love him; and without any distrust, or anxiety to know, whether the event will be prosperous or adverse. If we are ever so active in the outward performance of duty, and yet are not willing to leave the event with God, we have no part of real contentment. We must SUFFER, as well as DO the will of God. If we are in affliction, and use all proper means of deliverance, and yet are not delivered; there can be no just cause of impatience and unbelief—God is wise and good. Or if we can make no discovery of the end and design of the affliction, there can be no just cause for murmuring; for God not only designs the affliction itself for our good, but the darkness also, which veils its final issue. Under these views, the language of contentment is, “Leave it, leave it all with him.”—It is best with a spiritual eye, which sees

the hand of a just, wise and merciful God, in all dispensations; it sees that wisdom, power and goodness, are combined for the salvation of his people; and, that we have no reason to suspect the care and fatherly concern of God, though he may seem to tarry long; or even deny some things we ask. Let us then *unite* wrestling against principalities and powers; fighting the good fight of faith; running with patience the Christian race; with resting on the promises of God; and quietly believing God will do all things well, and we shall have both parts or the whole of contentment.

CONTENTMENT also is consistent with the most refined sensibility of soul; and with the purest sentiments, and acts of friendship. It does not eradicate our passions, but sanctifies and directs them to their proper objects. It is congenial with contentment, to do all possible good to the souls and bodies of men. To weep with those who weep, and rejoice with those who rejoice. To drop the tear of affection, over our afflicted, dying, or departed friends; to use our utmost exertions for the relief of the distressed; and manifest an affectionate concern for their prosperity and welfare.

But in all these things contentment admits of no murmuring against God; no undue confidence in the use of means; or a spirit of distrust, that God will not do all things well. And here lies the difference between the *passionate* exercises of a Christian and those of an unbeliever. The one is humble and grateful in prosperity; the other proud and unmindful of his gracious Benefactor. The one weeps with calmness and submission; the other with murmuring and discontent. The passions of believers are under the control of grace in their weeping and sympathy; but those of unbelievers are under the control of nature.

When the child of king David was sick, and ready to take its final leave of the world; he prostrates himself before Jehovah, he intercedes for its life with fasting; and spews all the sympathetic affection of a tender and afflicted father. He no sooner knew the will of God to be the death of the child, than he gave every possible mark, that all his affectionate struggles had

been *tempered with holy submission*. He rises from the earth, lays aside the garments of distress and parental mourning; enters the house of God, and with cheerful reverence pays him divine honours; and then returns to his own house, and gratefully receives that sustenance, which he before judged inconsistent with a state of submissive mourning and intercession.

When holy Job heard the sad and successive tidings of the destruction of property, and the loss of children; and was himself smitten with a loathsome disease, and the deepest bodily distress; and when to crown his sufferings, his wife called upon him to desert and curse God, his only hope and refuge; he shews himself capable of the finest feelings of friendship, when according to the custom of the times, he put on sackcloth as a badge of deep distress; and sat in ashes as a strong token of his sorrow, humiliation and anguish. But, as if to put the matter beyond all doubt, that contentment is consistent with the most refined feelings of friendly grief; he declares in vindication of the divine conduct, and to express his own cheerful acquiescence in it, *God has given and rightfully taken away, and praised be his name!*

Jeremiah is a prophet of God. He is filled with the spirit of a man of God. He has his eye fixed on immortality. He is patient under all the insults of his unbelieving countrymen. But when he views their apostacy from God, and the unhappy consequences which were likely to follow, he breaks forth in all the strains of *submissive* grief, and even wishes his *head were waters, and eyes a fountain of tears, that he might weep day and night for the unhappy state of his people.*

St. Paul had learned in whatever state he was in therewith to be content. And yet he commands to weep with those who weep; to rejoice with those who rejoice; and to bear each other's burdens. And concerning himself he declares on a certain occasion he greatly rejoiced; and on the account of the unbelieving Jews he had *great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart*; and to the Philipians he even mingles tears with his writing: as if he intended, both by precept

and example to make it fully appear, that all the sympathetic affections, and kind offices of friendship, were perfectly consistent with contentment.

We have no room to doubt, but our Lord possessed contentment in the highest degree. And yet in him we have a clear proof, that it may dwell in the same heart with the most refined feelings of affection and friendship. He wept at the grave of Lazarus. When he beheld Jerusalem he wept over it, and said, hadst thou known the things which belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes.—O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them who were sent unto thee; how oft would I have gathered thee,—but thou wouldst not!!

Let us then chuse the middle way, between indolent inactivity, and unbelieving anxiety; repining sorrow, and stupid insensibility, and we shall have that way of happiness, which the gospel points out for the benefit of the sons and daughters of degenerate Adam.

From this view of the subject it will appear, that the indolence of temper which often passes for contentment, no more deserves the name, than a block of marble deserves to be called a sympathetic friend. Were such characters to be fully known, it would be found, that some of them are too *stupid* to feel, and others too *lazy* to act. And to conceal their real character, they lay an *unlawful* claim to contentment. Under pretence that prayer and activity in other duties are dictating God, they pretend to so large a share of *contentment* as carelessly to neglect them all. If this indeed! deserves the name of contentment, they have an uncommon share of it!! They are *contented* habitually to break every command in the bible: or at least to neglect every duty. They are *contented* to let their fellow men suffer and die; without the least assistance and sympathy. But it is happy for men, that the temper of the gospel is a very different thing.—Having taken a short view of contentment, I am now led to enquire, whether the gospel makes this happy attainment the privilege of a few only; or whether the door of hope is not opened for all men.

No man can be happy without contentment; and if it is impossible for some men to be contented, it is impossible for some men to be happy. This truth is so plain, that no formal process of argument can make it plainer. There are but two ways, in which the door of contentment can be shut against any man. The one is, the refusing the offers of grace and the means of obtaining it; and the other, a *judicial* sentence passed by God on those, who through the day of their gracious visitation reject and despise the mercy of God, by which they are cut off from the means and the attainment. Such a sentence is sometimes passed while the subjects of it yet inhabit the earth; and with others the day of grace continues while life continues. When any have so sinned, as that God puts a period to their day of grace, he is represented as giving them eyes that they cannot see; ears that they cannot hear, and hearts not to understand, lest they should be converted, and healed. He is also said to give them up to strong delusions to believe a lie, and be damned. But the serious enquirers after truth will find by searching the scriptures, that this sentence is never represented as being passed on the subjects of it, until they had by a *long* or very aggravated course of rebellion fitted themselves for it, and rendered it just. It therefore remains a truth, that God does not *unconditionally* hedge up the way of contentment against any of his rational creatures; but through Christ the way is open to all men. And as if he designed, to put it beyond the possibility of being doubted, he declares he *takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he would turn and live.— Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die? And he will's all to come to repentance and be saved.*

That a full provision is made in the gospel, cannot be doubted if we keep in mind, *Christ died for all; is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world;* and that through the merit of his death the language of the gospel is, "Look unto me and be ye saved all ye ends of earth." "The Spirit and the Bride say come— whosoever will let him take the water of life freely." *Christ is the TRUE light, which lighteth every man; his*

Spirit reproveth the world; and his SAVING grace has appeared to all men.

But why should a God of unimpeached veracity, swear by himself and repeat the declaration, that he takes no pleasure in the *death*, but in the *life* of the sinner, or why should he give his Son to die for all, and make the invitations of the gospel and the strivings of the Spirit universal, if the way of contentment is not open to all men? If we are to have any confidence in the veracity and rectitude of Jehovah; if any in the gracious designs of God in the gift of his Son; if any in the invitations of the gospel, or the voice of the Holy Ghost; we must conclude, that no child of man is unconditionally shut out from the privilege and possibility of attaining contentment.

The scriptures make murmuring and discontent to be criminal; but if God never put the remedy within our reach, where can be the criminality? Can it be criminal not to obtain that which was never in our power? Do not the sons and daughters of discontent feel guilty for their murmuring and want of submission? If so, they carry in their own consciences a daily and strong proof, that contentment is their gracious privilege, and that they only are in the fault for not enjoying it.

But let it be well considered before we proceed, that God has *sovereignly* appointed the way, in which the blessing is to be received and enjoyed. It will only add to our misery to expect it in any other way; or to murmur against God for his established method. A clear proof we have of this, in Paul's description of the spirit and practice of the Jews, in the latter part of the 9th chapter of the epistle to the Romans. They had not attained the blessings of the gospel, because they opposed the method of God, and set up one of their own. And it is to be feared, this same thing hinders the pharisees and many unbelievers of the present day. Their being destitute of it does not prove God is unwilling they should possess it; but, that they unnecessarily refuse to have it on the terms of the gospel. This perhaps many may see when it is too late. And what must be their painful reflections, when they see the way

of happiness shut against them, as a punishment for the folly of refusing to walk therein, when it was open to them. What must be the greatness of their pain, when raging despair is joined to murmuring and discontent !

These considerations should alarm you, and stir you up, to seek with the whole heart, what is needful for happiness, both in life and death. Nothing beneath the sun should deter you from the important pursuit. The thing admits of no indifference ; nor yet of the the least delay. Time is flying, death and judgment are approaching ; and who shall procrastinate a preparation to meet God !

Since the door of contentment is open to all men, let the aged take courage and venture on the Saviour. What though you have lived three-score years in murmuring and discontent ; and even grown grey in sin ; be for once reminded, Jesus died for you, and pleads your guilty cause before the Father's throne. The Spirit also strives, and the gospel invites. Let these things move you to penitence, faith, and an earnest and persevering diligence for the happiness of a contented mind.

And if the aged may be blest, the middle aged and young need not despair ; but take courage and come to God for redeeming grace. Should you wickedly grieve the spirit till old age, God in judgment may cut you off from hope ; or you may fall victims to death, and become the miserable subjects of the punishment due to such base neglectors. Therefore be entreated not to put off to an uncertain hereafter, what should now be attended to.

Since the way is open and free, let mourning and burdened sinners, be inspired with an encouraging hope of salvation. Despair not, but apply to him who will in no wise refuse to hear ; who giveth to all who ask sincerely. Let not the conviction of being great and unworthy sinners, hinder your approaches to the Saviour : but remember Christ is a GREAT and WORTHY Redeemer.

Let weak believers be revived with courage and

strength, when they see how free and rich the gospel is, to give *contentment* in every state of life. You may find many difficulties, but grace can make you triumph over them all. You need the blessing, to be happy yourselves, and useful to others. And let the pleasing and evangelical picture, which has been drawn of contentment, attract every mind and engage all with holy zeal to seek it.

After having meditated on the excellency of contentment, and the free and open way which the gospel reveals for receiving and enjoying it; I was led to enquire why so few possessed the invaluable blessing. I found indeed the chief cause was the unnecessary inattention of the human heart; but still this might be divided into many particulars, which might be justly named hinderances. I was therefore led to notice and describe the following: viz.

A number of hindrances which lie in the way of getting into the *PATH* of contentment, have been already brought to view. But as most of them are not common to ordinary seekers after experimental truth^t it will be necessary for their benefit to describe those which more commonly occur.

Many take the dangerous and unlicensed liberty to reject what God has revealed; because they cannot find out and comprehend what he has seen fit to keep secret. They employ themselves about curious speculations to no purpose; and either neglect or despise what is inseparably connected with their present and future happiness, because God has not afforded full matter for the gratification of an idle curiosity. They are accustomed to ask many needless and impious questions; which can be neither understood nor answered: and then vainly boast, as if they had wholly disproved the Christian system; because they have had presumption enough, to attempt being wise above what is written. Nothing is more common than to hear them ask, how holy angels could be self tempted and fall from their primeval rectitude. How Adam could possess a holy nature and yet make a wrong choice. And how the unity of God can consist with the doctrine of the

Trinity: and many like questions. All these are revealed in scripture and substantiated as facts; but the manner of these facts God has not seen fit to reveal: and the manner is the very thing inquired after by a vain and speculative mind, while the facts and the evidences which establish them are passed by unheeded and misimproved. By this method men usually wander into deism, and from thence into scepticism. Because they cannot obtain a knowledge of the secrets of the Almighty, they reject all the evidences of revealed truth; and are so wretchedly inconsistent, as to make their ignorance of one, an evidence of the absurdity and uncertainty of the other. Which is no less absurd, than to reject the certainty of muscular motion, because they cannot understand its *mysterious* power. Or even to reject the existence of a God, because he *cannot be found out to perfection*.

Notwithstanding these men are so full of their enquiries, they are very cautious never to ask what they must do to be saved; because this would lead them to the plain truths of repentance, faith, love, self-denial, bearing the cross, following Christ, and other tempers and duties of a Christian.

They shrink from these truths, as an owl does from sun-light. And when addressed with them, they oppose and affect to doubt their reality, by proposing many useless and senseless enquiries concerning things unknown; which if true, of no importance to them.

This was my method in my days of deistical unbelief. I was almost fatally ensnared and deceived by it. But I found it absolutely necessary to renounce it entirely, and be willing to receive and follow the simple truths of the gospel, before I could be happy in any degree, by the possession of the smallest share of *christian contentment*. And all who are unhappily treading in this *path*, will find to their unspeakable sorrow, that they must turn their feet from it, before they can be contented and happy.

May I not here ask, whether all your curious and speculative enquiries have been attended with one grain of real happiness? Have you not left the plain beaten

ROAD of truth, for *one* uncertain, mountainous, difficult, and even hazardous? Does not every step you take, involve you in greater and greater uncertainty? And does not your anxiety to know, keep pace with your doubts? And does not your *unhappiness* equal your doubts and anxiety? I know this to be so; and know equally well how to pity you, and fain would reclaim you from your dangerous wanderings.

Has not God sufficiently made known the truth? Is there any duty which relates to himself, to our own souls, or our fellow-men, but he has made plain? Are any of those duties unreasonable? Is it not consistent with reason to say, if God is lovely, we should love him? And if we are made capable of loving each other, we should do this also? And is it not a reasonable duty to be contented with the allotments of divine providence? It is also equally a dictate of *right reason*, that such a frame of mind will yield substantial bliss. We know by painful experience, the opposite temper does not. No one can be so lost to common sense, as to affirm, that *two opposite moral effects* will flow from the same cause. And as we already know, that opposing the holy nature of God, his word and providences is a very *unhappy way*; the being reconciled to God, believing his word, and cheerfully submitting to his providential will, must be the only *way* of happiness, for a rational creature. Why will you not then submit to have this hindrance removed, and walk in the *way* of peace? Do you prefer misery to the happiness of contentment? If not, renounce your vain speculations, and embrace the plain and important truths of revelation; and be *contented* with such things as ye have.

The *fear of man* operates as a strong *hindrance* to resigning former objections and reasonings, and to prevent men from embracing the truth. It is known to be the common practice of the enemies of the cross of Christ, to laugh at all who seriously incline to seek after God: They therefore expect to meet with this treatment. They do not like to be considered fools and cowards, for renouncing their vanities, and for becoming pious and devout.—They sometimes *fear*, they shall

never be able to endure all this kind of treatment they must meet with, and pretend it better not to attempt a religious profession, than to be unsuccessful by being overcome. Others *fear* the frowns of their superiors. Especially if they are dependant on them for employment and the necessaries of life: they fear being turned off, and of suffering for its needful supplies. And to encrease this fear, some of the rich enemies of God and man, have threatened seekers of salvation with all this, and even put their threatenings in execution. Others *fear* they shall not arrive at their desired stations of worldly honor; or that they shall be deprived of them by their constituents, if they embrace the cross of Christ.

Torn and perplexed with these *fears*, many think of deferring the concerns of salvation till a more convenient season. But why should a fellow-worm be feared more than God? Why should the favour of men, and the honor of this world, be preferred to the favor of God, and the honor which cometh from above? What are the sneers and frowns of dying men, to the disapprobation and condemnatory sentence of the Judge of all the earth! Perhaps those whose frowns and sneers you so much dread, would be the very first to join you in the PATH of contentment, were you boldly to declare yourselves to be travellers. Admitting it should be otherwise, you can have no just excuse for your dangerous delays. You must stand or fall to your own Master! If you are wise, it will be for yourself; and if you scorn, you alone must bear it! In other things you are not *afraid* to have an opinion independent of others, or to avow that opinion: and why should you be under the influence of a base *fear*, in the ALL IMPORTANT subject of present and eternal salvation! Religion is the best of all pursuits, consequently it calls for the greatest boldness and activity. In the spirit and exercise of pure religion, God will be your Father, Jesus your Saviour, the Holy Ghost your Comforter, angels your ministers, the gospel your treasury, saints your companions, contentment your daily repast, wisdom your guide, grace your strength, holi-

ness and peace your way, and heaven your home. You have therefore every possible reason for casting off *slavish fear*, and for instantly entering on a course of gospel contentment. Up then and be doing, if you would not linger out a miserable life, and at last lie down in endless sorrow.

Pride keeps many from contentment. This temper has many ways to exercise and shew itself. Some are passionately proud of the frippery and superfluities of dress, rich attire, the fashionable honors of life, of beauty, graceful behavior, wit, or learning. And though they see, that a proud attachment to these, is utterly irreconcilable with the humble spirit of the gospel; yet they are so extremely fond of them, they will not forsake them, for the *course* it describes. They well know, evangelical plainness in all things, will draw on them the censure and ridicule of the world, and worldly professors; and to these crosses their pride *will* not stoop.

Others have been in the habit of carrying an *even yoke*, with the rich and prodigal, in entertainments, treats, and fashionable amusements. And now pride says, if you decline these things in future, your companions will look on it as covetousness and superstition. And many through a *foolish fear* of incurring such names of scandal, ruin themselves and families in this world, and their own souls in that which is to come; by making their expenditures larger than their income, and by being joined with men of corrupt principles, and intemperate and vicious habits. It is well known, that the pride of the human heart inclines all such men to be equal with their *fellows*, or to outdo them; and when they have long pursued this course, it is mortifying to break off, and bear the insulting scoffs of their *Galio* companions.

Pride may lead some men to profess a fashionable religion, to get *offices*, or to be reputed *good*. But such a pride of all others stands the most in the way of contentment. When once they are settled in it, nothing can be more mortifying to their pride, than to acknowledge they have not been genuine christians; and so

come out from a worldly sanctuary, and become Christians in spirit and practice. Such have through pride, almost every possible temptation to live destitute of the spirit of Jesus Christ.

Some who have in heart backslidden from God, may by backsliding have imbibed the spirit of pride, which inclines them to conceal their state, by pretending as much zeal and resolution as ever; when they are inwardly conscious, they have lost the spirit of true fervency, and have fallen into a state of lukewarmness. Although this may seem almost incredible, yet I fancy it is no uncommon case. Those who have been the most forward in zeal and activity, when they have in any measure fallen, often find strong temptations to be ashamed to confess; and too often yield and fall under the influence of that pride, which hinders a penitential confession, and humble return to their first love.

Pride may lead men to do things to be seen of others, and so to gain their praise. To wish the good will and christian approbation of others, is not evil; but to have the gratification of our vanity, by the loud sounding praise of others, the motive of our duties is exactly the same sin, for which our Lord so severely condemned the pharisees.

But remember, pride in all its shapes is entirely inconsistent with contentment; and must be mortified before the other can be enjoyed. Although this truth is so plain, many undertake to compound them,—to mingle pride and humility, the service of God, and the service of Mammon. In their characters there is a strange mixture of profession and profanity. To see their countenances in the house of worship, one would think them saints of the highest order; but to see their *dress* and conduct at other times, they would be taken for avowed unbelievers.—O ye sons and daughters of pride, ye must lie as low in the dust as the poor ye despise, and like them have corruption and worms for your companions.

UNBELIEF is a hinderance.—It rejects the word of God altogether, or sets up a standard which it calls reason, and then undertakes to determine, what part

of scripture is right and to be believed, and what part is wrong. In opposition to plain scripture it will undertake to pronounce some things inconsistent with the divine character, and others consistent.—It sometimes completely veils the character of God, with what is termed his mercy; and at others, covers his mercy with what is wrongly called his justice or sovereignty. It makes him so merciful, as to connive at all sin; or ascribes to him such a kind of justice, as to make him punish *one* for the sin of *another*, and even to punish for *doing his will*. It either so represents the law as to discourage the fearful in obtaining the promises; or makes such use of the promises, as to convert the law into a mere *scarecrow*.—It leads men into the austerities of *monkish superstition*, and teaches that the gospel requires an extreme of self-denial and bodily severities; or else it leads to antinomian indifference, and insinuates, that all acts of obedience are inconsistent with gospel liberty.—It teaches that religion consists wholly in the form or means; or rejects the means of grace and talks of *quietism* and the *light within*. It will sometimes have the power of religion to consist only in *moderation*, and a *still small voice*; and at others, that it consists only in violent shoutings, enthusiastick rantings and visionary dreams. It represents the providence of God, either as *necessitating all events good and bad*; or as *totally* neglecting the universe, and leaving every thing to the blind government of chance. But who does not see, that these are all wild extremes, and that the truth lies exactly between!

When we talk of reformations, *unbelief* will always have some hinderance in the way.—There are so many bad things in the church; or the preacher is so wanting in energy, none can be converted by him. Sinners are so hardened, they will not hear and repent, therefore says unbelief the work will not revive. If we are convinced of the need of more holiness, unbelief is always ready to count over former convictions and resolutions; and say, it is in vain to resolve any more, for you will no more keep these than those before made: you had better not resolve, than do it and

not fulfil. When God brings his gracious promise near, and calls us to receive it, unbelief suggests, we are unworthy, or it cannot be fulfilled now, we must wait and be fitted. It always sets God a *time*, by putting off to a future period, when he declares, *now is the accepted time and day of salvation*.

These are some of the various ways in which unbelief operates. And those who have carefully observed these operations either in themselves or others, will see, they are a great hinderance to that happiness which springs from contentment. And as far as they are under the influence or government of it, so far they are hindered, and kept back from true enjoyment. We must therefore renounce these dictates of unbelief, if we would by faith seize and enjoy the promised blessing.

Indulged *self-will* proves a hinderance, by inspiring men with opposition to the will of God. It refuses what God appoints and commands. If he appoints afflictions, it murmurs for the want of prosperity. If he commands humility, it pleads for pride. If he requires faith, it justifies the nature and effects of unbelief. If he enjoins the love of our neighbor, it pretends there are so many hateful things in him, he deserves no love. Or if God teaches the importance of self-denial, and mortification of the deeds of the body, it is all for ease and carnal self-indulgence.

It will not condescend to the weakness and infirmity of a brother, nor make the least charitable allowance for a conscientious difference of opinion. In all cases of misunderstanding it will not bow, or charitably condescend to others; but requires the most servile submission from them. He who will not yield to the will of God, or accommodate himself to men, as far as is consistent with truth and a good conscience, may well expect to find things to cross and distress him. It is no more reasonable, that others in all things should submit to his will and judgment; than that he should do the same to them. And while he fancies himself the standard of rectitude, and thinks all obliged to acknowledge his measure and weight; he will meet

with so much opposition and so little subjection, as will perpetually irritate his feelings, and keep up a frame of mind so opposite to contentment, that he will find it absolutely necessary to renounce the one, before he can enjoy the other.

But in doing this, the other extreme should be avoided. Some are such *latitudinarians* as to say *yes, yes*, to all sentiments and opinions, and submit to all customs as if they were disciples of all. Such have no opinion, and like a *vane* turn round with every wind: or else are so cowardly and indifferent in the defence of their own creed, as to do violence to their own understandings, by a base conformity to what they in heart believe is wrong.—It is true, we are commanded to contend earnestly for the faith; and we have liberty from the law of God and man to maintain our right; but have no licence to substitute self-will for christian firmness; but we are rather commanded to possess and exercise the condescending spirit of the lowly Redeemer. Walk then in the medium of these extremes, and you will have the line of evangelical truth. But err on either hand, and you wander from the PATH of contentment.

The *love of the world* often proves a hinderance to contentment and its blessings. The apostle has pronounced it enmity to God; and the friends of the world, the enemies of God. Too strong an attachment to the world, hinders the mind from ascending to God and heavenly things. Those who are voluntarily the slaves of the world, find little time to reflect on the concerns of their souls, or to attend to the duties of religion. Every thing of a spiritual nature must give place to some worldly pursuit. Or if they are not wholly given up to the world, they are so entangled, as to pay a very partial attention to religious duties, or vainly attempt serving God and Mammon; by which they make no progress toward a contented and happy mind. Such persons have so little care for the prosperity of Zion, they discover no concern, though it be ever so low and desolate. But if the streams of worldly prosperity do not overflow their banks; nothing is

heard from them, but lamentable complaints; either against God or government, or some other thing they suppose to have been the cause of the evil. Their conduct generally furnishes a full evidence, that our Lord spake the truth when he said, *where the treasure is, the heart will be; and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.* We hear little else in their conversation, but of their schemes, bargains, expectations, fears, and possessions: even Sabbath days and intermissions of publick worship not excepted.

Men of this character seldom walk in a proper medium. But are commonly prodigal or covetous. If the former, they sooner or later become dissipated, profane *free-thinkers*; the pests of good society and the curse of mankind. If the latter, they are rarely honest, but defraud the poor of their right, over-reach all in their power, take advantage of their ignorance, and increase their own wealth by the destruction of others.—For fear of being impoverished they shut their bowels of compassion against the poor.

If any of these for a season gain a victory over their besetting sin, they seldom long retain their liberty; but are sooner or later brought into bondage. The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, steal upon the soul, choak the word, and render it unfruitful. They decline by almost imperceptible degrees, till they seem wholly engrossed with the world again. And though they yet call themselves Christians, and profess a zeal for God, yet their eagerness for the world, and neglect of religious duties, clearly evince, they are unhappily deceiving their own souls. It need never surprise us to find such men unhappy, since we know it impossible, for a prevailing love of the world and contentment to dwell in the same heart.

Would we have worldly possessions prove a blessing to us, we must behave as stewards under the inspection of God; and labor to do all possible good; which may easily be hindered, either by covetousness or prodigality. It is a dictate of reason and scripture, so to use the things intrusted in our care, as to have an approving conscience when called to leave them. But will luxury,

or tainted covetousness, furnish matter for the approving smiles of conscience, or those of a righteous Judge! The vast possessions of the rich can avail them nothing in a dying hour: even if they continue theirs till that period. But with all their riches, pride, and pomp, the day of life may be long enough to reduce them to a state of penurious distress. Or should they leave them to others, as is often the case, they may prove a curse, by furnishing means of indulgence, luxury, and wickedness. How many sons have thus been ruined soul and body, who might have been a blessing to society, had they been left to get a living by honest industry. What will it therefore profit a man, to gain the whole world and lose his own soul!

Our Lord has taught us the difficulty, the rich are under, of entering into the kingdom of heaven. The apostle has cautioned the rich not to be high minded, or trust in uncertain riches; and declared, those who will be rich fall into foolish and hurtful desires, which drown men's souls in perdition. Consequently pride and perdition are inseparably connected with a criminal attachment to riches. Let the idolatrous lovers of this world, hear this and tremble! Let them be liberal to the poor! Let them repent and believe the gospel! Love God and keep his commandments, lay up a treasure in heaven, and have their hearts and affections there also! And let them be so weaned from the world, as to be able to leave it with joy, and go to possess an inheritance, incorruptible and that fadeth not away: otherwise they will be effectually hindered in the way of happiness.

An *envious* man cannot be a *contented* man, therefore *envy* must be a *hinderance* to contentment. There is scarce an evil more detestable, and very few more common. It sickens and pines at the prosperity of others, and can never be happy only in their misery. The envious deprive themselves of enjoyments, lest others should partake with them. They cannot bear a rival, or an equal. They wish all were ignorant, poor, and dishonorable but themselves; and would gladly have the undivided possession of every thing great. If

any are spoken of in terms of approbation, either for beauty, riches, pleasure, honor, or learning, it pierces like a drawn sword, and pains them like the agonies of death. Such persons from a conviction, that it is a reproach to them to be under the influence of such a temper, labor to conceal it; and for this purpose sully the reputation of others, to adorn their own, by working under ground like the insignificant *mole*. If they are obliged to acknowledge good in others, they slyly insinuate, they have more than a balance of evils; or that something selfish and wrong destroys the *goodness* of the action. If it cannot be denied, but they have been instruments of good, they are ever ready to ascribe that good to some other means, hoping thereby to strip them of their reputation. They are fond of ascribing great things to themselves, and are clamorous in their own praise; but speak of others in scandalous or diminutive language; and often hint that things are far worse than they that chuse to relate, and it is out of pure good will, they speak as favorable of them as possible. There can hardly be a more sure sign of envy, than to be often found in this kind of detraction.

It is unhappy to have this temper in the heart, struggling for victory; but much more so, when it leads its subjects in a state of entire captivity. We can scarcely conceive of any in this world more unhappy. Nor can we conceive of a more powerful *hinderance* to contentment. No one therefore need flatter himself he is in the way of happiness, or even can be, while he harbors a temper so opposite to the gospel, and hateful in the sight of holy beings. He must therefore either renounce this, or his expectations of happiness. A man might as well expect to be at ease in a bed of liquid fire, as to be happy under the government of envy. And has not the experience of such long taught them this? And will they care in their bosoms a venomous viper, which has already bitten them, and the poison of whose bite threatens their present and future destruction? Rather exchange this diabolical spirit for the mind which was in Christ. Let nothing deter you from this, lest if you so much

imitate Satan here, you should have to suffer with him hereafter.

BIGOTRY is nearly related to *envy* and *self-will*, and an equal *hinderance* to contentment. It usually exercises itself on religious objects. Those who are governed by it, make all damnable hereticks, but those of their own party and profession. The sentiments of some who maintain the interests of their party, may differ more from their *real creed*, than the sentiments of those called dissenters; but they can find an excuse, and make a *party covering* for the one; but can find nothing to mitigate, what they consider the *abominable crime of dissenting*! They delight to gather up all the infirmities and failings of others, and magnify them into mountainous faults, and make them appear black as the darkness of the bottomless pit; but are skilful to invent excuses, and a thousand soft names for the enormous crimes, which are committed among their *own party*. No name is too bad to express the criminality of dissenting, from what they term the *good old way*; nor any too soft and innocent, to call those measures by, which they execute, by reviling, persecuting; hanging, burning, or banishing, those who have the misfortune, not to have their consciences run in the *sandy mould* of their opinion: or perhaps, what is still worse, cannot conscientiously join them in the violation of every article of the creed, which these bigots have themselves dissented from; and are ridiculed or put to death, for no other *crime*, but steadfastly adhering to the professed creed of their persecutors; and for not violating it, without scruple or conscience like the pretended adherents of it, who nevertheless are the real dissenters.

It is impossible to calculate the cruelties, which have been committed under the reign of bigotry, and all out of a pretended zeal for the glory of God! and the good of his Church!! The earth has drank in the blood of millions, and the wind has borne their dying groans upwards to the ears of an offended God, to be registered in the book of his remembrance, as a witness of the blackest criminality, when the nations of the

earth shall stand before him. Nor on that day shall the groans and pangs of expiring nature, poured forth by unhappy exiles, be silent! but rise in tremendous files, as witnesses of that criminal cruelty, which doomed them to languish in distant lands for the comforts of life; without a friend to close their languid eyes, to follow their mournful *herse*, or drop a friendly tear over the spot of earth, which terminates their exile, and puts an everlasting period to their death-like solitude.

When the church and state can no longer be *yoked together*, and when by this, *carnal priests* can no longer influence a wicked magistracy to burn and banish its best subjects, the sons of bigotry draw out the tongue of slander, and vilify all they dislike; and like the malicious Jews ascribe to the agency of Satan, what has the visible marks of divine power: and for no other reason, but because it is wrought out of their *prescribed* limits. They call repentance and faith, trying to be saved by works of self-merit, deeds of charity, splendid hypocrisy, and every appearance of devotion, feigned sanctity.

The above description may shew us, that bigotry robs the soul of Christian fellowship, and often of humanity. It stops the ear and blinds the eye of charity, in such a manner, that no good thing can be seen or heard, in those who do not bow before its altar, and implicitly confide in its antisciptural traditions.

But whoever compares bigotry with the charity, tenderness, meekness, forbearance, forgiveness, and brotherly-kindness, taught in the gospel, must see it so entirely opposite thereto, as to be led at once to pronounce it inconsistent with the least degree of Christian contentment. Let those who have any fixed intention to seek for happiness in the right way, resolutely resist it, and seek for that charity which is the bond of perfection.

A settled desire and determination of *revenge*, is opposite to contentment, and will effectually hinder those from the enjoyment of it, who allow it to possess the heart. The want of a forgiving temper, or merely be-

ing destitute of love, the gospel makes a great crime, but when it strengthens itself into a spirit of revenge, it is far more criminal. As the gospel not only forbids the want of forgiveness and a revengeful temper; but strongly recommends forgiveness and a heavenly temper; so we cannot expect to be forgiven, unless we forgive; except we utterly discredit the word of Christ, which affirms there is no forgiveness for the revengeful and unforgiving. And if we harbor revenge in the heart, and yet pray in the words or sentiments of the Lord's prayer, our praying at best is presumptuous, heaven-daring hypocrisy. We have long detested the conduct of the hard-hearted servant in the parable, who inhumanely took his fellow-servant by the throat, and cast him into prison, because he could not pay him fifty pence, when his Lord had just forgiven him ten thousand talents: nor dare we say, but his being cast into prison till he should *pay the last mite*, was the execution of a sentence, justly due to his extreme criminality. And what good reason have we to expect to escape, if we are guilty of a like crime? Moreover we feel it so opposite to religion and happiness, we must be mad with folly, to attempt to justify ourselves in it. Let us then forgive as we would wish to be forgiven; seek to be reconciled, and make use of the first opportunity, and all possible means for this desirable end.

Evil *surmisings* and *ungodly jealousies*, strongly operate against all holy attainments. When once we begin to surmise evil of our brother, it soon becomes very easy to convert every look, word and action of his, into an evidence of hatred, or at least want of affection. As far as we fall under the power of evil surmising, just so far we are blind to all the proofs he gives, or can give of brotherly love. If he does not take more than ordinary pains, to convince us of love and good-will; our suspicions will so far blind the sight, as to make us readily imagine he takes none at all, but rather labors to shew, he has lost all fellowship for us. If at any time through intense application to study or business, or by reason of some uncommon

temptation, he does not discover a usual degree of fondness, we take it for granted without further enquiry, he has a settled hatred against us. Before the spirit of evil surmising gained possession of the mind, all would have passed unnoticed, or we should have charitably ascribed his conduct to the true cause; but nothing will satisfy a jealous mind, but the worst construction that can be put on all the conduct of others. In most instances there is not the least change in the temper or conduct of our brother; but jealousy has made us use our eyes in such a manner, as to see coldness, hatred and evil, which have no other existence, but in our own evil surmising hearts.

The same spirit of evil which creates these jealousies towards our brother, takes every possible method to hinder us from knowing the state of his affections towards us. Were we to go and inquire in the spirit of love, satisfaction might easily be gained. But instead of a method so evangelical, it is allowed to gain strength, till it grows to a settled hatred; and perhaps to complete the crime, we report our *evil surmisings*, and charge our brother with hatred and breach of covenant; when at the same time, he feels nothing but the purest affection for us: and perhaps never would have felt otherwise, had he not heard of our complaints to others against him; which first proves a matter of temptation, and to which perhaps he afterwards yields,—the want of love and obstinate hardness follow, and a lasting, painful breach takes place in the church of God. By this method there is perhaps more discord sown in the church, than by any other which can be named.

But nothing can be more contrary to the spirit of the gospel: especially the lessons of charity taught us, first of Corinthians thirteenth. Be exhorted then to stand on your guard against it, as you would against Satan himself. It will destroy your peace and the peace of the church. You can never attain or enjoy the blessing of contentment, while you give it any place in your heart. It must torment and distress you. You have found it a very uncomfortable companion.

Lay it aside and run with joy in the *path* of *brotherly* contentment.

Many imagine a change of outward circumstances, will make them happy in the enjoyment of a contented mind. But the imagination is in itself so restless and vain, to many it is one of the greatest *hinderances* to the temper they wish to enjoy. Such do not consider, the foundation of happiness must be laid in being contented with the outward circumstances allotted by divine providence, and not in teasing their minds by fruitless wishes for a change.—The poor imagine if they were rich, they should be *contented* and *happy*. The sick suppose they should have nothing to annoy their peace if they were in health.—The *single* think, if they were married and settled in life, they could not miss of happiness or a contented mind.—The married imagine their family cares and concerns, are the only *hinderances* to their happiness. Children and servants imagine if they were free, they should enjoy supreme felicity. Nor can we find but few, who do not ascribe their want of happiness to their outward circumstances, and suppose if these were changed, they should have no interruption or hinderance.

But let those say, who were once poor; but now rich, whether their happiness has kept pace with the increase of their wealth; or whether they are not as discontented as before. Or let others speak, who have experienced the change of outward circumstances for which they pined, and witness if they can, that the change brought with it, the expected bliss.

The *fabulist* seems to have had an eye to this subject, when he told us, Jupiter issued a proclamation to all the *discontented*, to bring the causes of their *discontent*; and exchange them for other things, which they judged would remove all causes of complaint, and make them happy. A man who had long made himself extremely miserable, because he had *no son*, and was afflicted with the gout; thought to remove all causes of future trouble, by changing his *gout* for a *son*. He had not gone far after he made the change, before he discovered the temper of his son, to be very rebellious and perverse.

He began his intolerable abuse on the *old man*, by *scratching, striking, biting and pulling hair!* He soon discovered his mistake, and was glad to obtain leave to give up his son for the gout. And many others who had made their exchange, were glad of liberty to be placed in their former circumstances.

The change of outward circumstances according to our wishes, will not only fall short of the expected happiness; but if we were gratified would often render us much more unhappy, if it did not prove our ruin. Rebekah and Jacob wish to put *him* into the place of the *first born*. But they did it at the expence of their peace.—Rachel said give me children or I die, and yet the grant of this wish, proved the means of her death. The brethren of Joseph attempted to reverse what his dreams portended, but they opened the floodgate of evil upon themselves. When we repine under the allotments of providence, and ask a change; we seldom know what we ask, any more than the *inexperienced* child, who pines for liberty to play with a drawn sword. And it is one of the greatest mercies of indulgent heaven, that we are denied.

Let us therefore consider the nature of this evil, and shall we not see it so black and horrible, as to be deterred from the practice of it. It is practically saying, we know better than God what is for our good; that he does not govern in wisdom and goodness; and if he would give the reins into our hands, we would manage better the affairs of the universe. Daring impiety! And does the sight of it shock and surprize us! Let us then be contented to submit to the government of God, and commit our souls and bodies to his care and keeping, as into the hands of a faithful Creator.

The flatteries of the world and of worldly professors, often prove a great *hindrance* to young believers. When first brought to know the truth, they are taught by the Spirit and word of God, to come out from the spirit and forbidden customs of the world; and to be Christians in heart and life, in *dress*, manners and conversation. But they no sooner attempt this, than they are surrounded by a swarm of worldly flatterers, and

professors, who tell them, there is no need of such singularity in order to be Christians. "You may adorn the body with superfluities, and use all the fashionable amusements, and be as good as if you refuse them. What harm can there be in these little things? Do you not believe, *such and such* are Christians?" They say there is no evil in them. Our minister does so, and he says it is all perfectly innocent. And will you be so uncharitable, as to condemn all those who are not so stiff and singular as yourselves?" This kind of reasoning is not uncommon, and too often has a very evil influence, on young beginners in the way of truth and happiness.

But let such remember, it is not what some professors do or say, which you are to make your rule, but it is what the bible commands. If so, where is the command, which gives the least authority to the above reasoning. There is no authority for it—there is not a word of gospel for it all. It is as plainly opposite to the word of God, as if they had plead for theft, or lying. Nor can any one deny it, who will read the bible impartially, and with an eye to the judgment seat of Christ.

The time you spend in preparing and putting on unnecessary ornaments, might be better spent in devotion, and in visiting the sick and afflicted. The money you thus unwisely expend, if given to the poor and needy, would relieve their distresses, and ease you of the charge and punishment, of wasting your Lord's goods. Tell me, what an account will you give to the Judge of all the earth, for this dreadful waste of time and money! And for taking from the poor, what God gave you to bestow upon them, and not to pamper and strengthen your pride. Consider whether there are not orphans and widows, who suffer even now, who should have been fed and clothed at the expence of your pride and superfluities. Their groans and tears of distress will witness against you, and testify, that God made you their stewards, and you defrauded them of their right. Read the 5th chapter of James and lay it well to heart. In short, read the whole book of God, and know, it

every where condemns a base conformity to the world.

But you will say, "we have given to the poor." But have you done as much as you could have done, or might now do, if those extravagancies were laid aside, and you walked in the plain path of the gospel? Remember there is an *excellent*, a *more excellent*, and a *most excellent* way! And if you profess to be a christian believer, why not strive for the most excellent. It is to be feared, that those who but faintly strive for the *excellent way*, and have no other design, but just barely to escape punishment, and at the same time convinced of the *most excellent way*, will in the end be painfully disappointed of salvation. You cannot be too holy, or do too much good. Strive therefore for the highest attainments; and when you come to die you will not repent having clothed yourselves in modest apparel, like the primitive Christians; and absented yourselves from the vain spirit and amusements of the world, and, that you appropriated your time and money, (which would otherwise have been wasted,) in alleviating the distresses of your afflicted brethren. To be able then to reflect, that you employed your time and talents to the best of purposes, will afford unspeakable consolation. Would you have this consolation in life and death, reject with holy contempt the insinuations and flatteries of worldly professors, and take the gospel for your guide, without regard to the false glosses put on it, by these votaries of *fashionable religion*.

Such as are languid in their affections, too often are displeased with such as are warm in their first love, and try to check and damp their zeal. They talk as if *backsliding were necessary and unavoidable*; as if *winter seasons* were favorable to a growth in grace; and as if *sin were necessary* to humble believers. You will no doubt have trials and temptations of various kinds, but by the grace of God you need not depart from him. You have no authority from scripture to say, he will ever forsake you, unless you first forsake him. And you will always find, instead of being humbled by sin, that the more sin you have, the more pride. And if

you are ever humbled, it is by grace and not by sin; unless you can prove, sin and grace bear the same fruit, or have the same effect.

Learn to distinguish between the darkness of sin and the darkness of temptation. They are essentially different. The former you will never have, unless you sin against God; the latter you cannot avoid, be you ever so faithful. If you are then told, you cannot always feel as when first brought to taste redeeming love, be assured in one sense it is false, and in another it is true. If they mean you must lose your confidence in God, and grow cold in affection toward him, it is false. For the bible no where teaches this to be necessary and unavoidable. But on the contrary, it teaches, *to be steadfast immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: To walk in Christ as you received him: That your peace may be as the rivers, constantly flowing: And that you may be made as Mount Zion.*

But if they mean you must be tempted and tried, and that under these exercises you cannot feel, as when you have intervals of victory, it is true. In this sense you may be in *darkness* and have *no light*, as saith the prophet Isaiah. But you should stay yourselves on God. And though your trials are such, that you have no light with respect to their *end*; the manner of your *deliverance*, and many other *circumstances*; yet if according to the prophet, you stay yourselves on God, he will support you, and bring you off more than conquerors.

The temptations of believers are various, and often *hinder* their progress in the way of happiness. When first brought to know the truth, they are sorely tempted to keep it a secret, lest they should be deceived, or not persevere. Satan suggests, "You may not be a christian, and if you should profess to be one when you are not, or backslide from the Lord if you are, it will be better to make no profession. You should wait and know whether you are a Christian; and if you are, know also, whether you can hold out, before you publicly profess faith in Christ." If by this method he can prevail with you to neglect this duty, he knows it

will bring darkness, because it is disobeying the command of Christ, which bids you *bold up your light before the world*. By yielding to such temptations, it is to be feared, many *begin to die*, almost as soon as they begin to live. But you ask how it can be known, that impressions are from the Spirit of God; instead of being the temptations of Satan? The answer is easy, If they are from Satan, resisting them will bring an increase of hatred to sin, of love to holiness, and of spiritual joy. But if you yield to them, sin and holiness will appear to you, to be subjects of less and less concern and importance. If you are honest in your enquiries, it will not be a very difficult matter to know, which effect is produced, and consequently to know, whether the impression is from the Spirit of truth or Satan.

You may be tempted to believe, there is no God; no Redeemer, or truth in the Christian religion. In prayer and other duties you may be distressed by evil and wandering thoughts, and be tempted to disbelieve the promises of God; to be proud of your gifts and performances; or to be ashamed, and entirely neglect them. And to complete the trial, you may be strongly impressed to take all these, as so many certain evidences of being deceived. It is suggested, Christians are not so tempted, and if you were one, you would not be.

But remember for your encouragement, all Christians are thus tempted more or less: Christ has been in all points tempted like his followers; and is therefore able to succour the tempted. These temptations to evil are not sin to you, unless you embrace them and delight in them. And you may easily tell whether you abhor or love them. What is then the prevailing disposition of your mind? On the most careful examination do you find an abhorrence of them, or a delight in them? If the former, continue to resist, and Christ will give the victory.

Others may be tempted in a different way, to think themselves deceived, and to be building on a sandy foundation. The tempter says, "Your conviction and spiritual change was not like others, therefore you are

wretchedly deceived. Your sins were more numerous and heinous than theirs, but your distress and sorrow for sin were not half as great. They were almost in despair, saw themselves on the very verge of hell; and had no rest for many weeks. Others saw Christ as it were on the cross dying for them: And when they were relieved, their souls overflowed with joy, and were ready to take wings and fly away to eternal rest. And since then, they have been often filled with holy raptures, as if they were just ripe for heaven. And if you were a Christian, you would have had all these exercises, and in the same degree."

Such temptations greatly afflict you, and you scarcely know which way to turn for relief. You sometimes fear the day of grace is past; and although the former distress and sorrow are removed, there remains a fear lest they are not removed by pardon; but by being given up to blind stupidity, the senses are so benumbed, as to have lost all former sense of guilt and sorrow. For this you sigh, and think if you could but feel convicted as heretofore, there would be some hope of your salvation.

Let us now retrace our steps, and look over the subject a little. A sorrow for sin and change of heart, are essentially the same in all who experience them, yet they may differ in many circumstances. All will see and acknowledge themselves sinners; but some may have a more distressing view of this than others. All such will feel deserving of punishment; but some may so deeply realize this, as nearly to despair of mercy, and view themselves on the very brink of destruction. All will see Christ died and made atonement for them; but some may have their spiritual senses so deeply affected with the view of it, that it will appear almost real to them, that they see Christ extended on the cross, bleeding and dying for their salvation. Though various and good reasons may be assigned for these circumstantial views, yet they cannot be absolutely necessary to true repentance; for many have truly repented without them. It is indeed necessary for all to feel wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, and come to Christ

as unworthy sinners, and by faith lay hold on the merits of his death, for pardon and justification. And when this has taken place, none need doubt and fear, because they have never found in themselves, the peculiar circumstances of which others speak.

Some who are renewed by grace, have a clear and direct witness of the Spirit, the moment it is wrought. Others, though they feel a change, yet remain in doubt, and dare not fully believe they have received the spirit of adoption. They find on examination; they hate sin, love holiness, the law of God, and his people, but lacking that overflowing of joy they find in others, they fear it dangerous to believe themselves children of grace. But such may consider, there are various causes of their being thus. Though it is the privilege of all the children of God, to have an evidence of the forgiveness of sin; yet for wise purposes, and reasons unknown to us, he may give a clearer evidence to some than others. Such may be the natural bias of some, that it is best for them, to gain every step of Christian enjoyment by the point of the spiritual sword. And though he will not leave them so destitute of a witness, as absolutely to discourage them; yet he may thereby lead to a deep acquaintance with themselves, to feel their own weakness, and dependance on grace, which eventually may be the greatest blessing.—Their fears may be owing partly, to the state of their natural constitutions. Some are naturally of a fearful and melancholy habit, and though the temper of the heart may be changed by grace, yet it may never so alter the natural bias of the constitution; as entirely to prevent the doubts and fears, which naturally arise out of it.—Others have broken constitutions, and are become extremely *nervous*. And such is the nature of the disease, and the connexion of the mind with the *nervous system*, that a certain great divine said, “religion will no more keep the spirits from sinking in a *nervous* complaint, than it will keep the pulse from beating in a fever.”

In some the leading passion may be fear, in others joy. Those who have joy for their leading passion, will discover with the same degree of grace, a greater

overflowing of joy, than those whose leading passion is a kind of melancholy fear.—A great degree of joy is not always a certain mark of great strength and depth of holiness, though it often accompanies it. We see those, who are fathers in the church, who have faithfully borne the cross for many years, and who discover less *animation* and *overflowing joy*, than many *new-born* believers. But when their humility, firmness, and strength are put to the trial; and compared with those who outshine them in joy, they are found greatly superior to them. God for wise reasons may give overflowing joy to a father in Christ; as the Israelites ate of Canaan's grapes, before they came into possession of the land in which they grew.—In Christians young in experience, there seems in many cases to be more than an equal balance of joy; designed no doubt in part to supply the place of other Christian graces, till they by little and little, gain sufficient strength and wisdom to be exercised and tried for themselves. Were a *child in grace* to be put on the immediate exercise of patience, without being borne up with a more than common share of joy, he would soon faint and fall. But being fed with the milk of divine joy, he at length receives that degree of experience and strength, by which he can bear an equal balance and exercise of the several Christian graces. Were these things properly weighed and understood, they would comfort and bear up the minds of such, as are subject to unhappy doubts and fears. They would enjoy good hope in the witness of their acceptance already given, although not so clear and strong, as is possessed by some of the children of God; or they would be led to him for stronger consolation through grace.

Some believers have seasons of peculiar prosperity; and in which they resolve like David they will never be moved; but will always live in such a soaring triumphant frame of mind. It is not long before they are beset with temptations on every side. As they have not well considered, that the Christian's life is a warfare, and that trials are unavoidable; so they now lie open to peculiar temptations, to think they are de-

ceived in what they had taken to be Christian comfort. But let me tell you, the resolution was wrong. It strongly resembles the temper of Peter, when he wished to build tabernacles, and take up his residence on the mount of transfiguration. But you should be as willing to be with Christ in the garden of suffering, as to be with him on the holy mount. To resolve always to live in that frame of mind in which you would have no trials, (I do not say backslidings) is nothing short of changing the Christian's life, and to make it not a warfare; which is contrary to the order of God. For you cannot call that state a warfare, in which the mind is raised above trials, and in which all temptations are suspended. And if you have no trials, your faith cannot be tried; nor can there be any room for the exercise of Christian patience and fortitude. And what Christian on mature deliberation, would seriously wish these excellent graces to lie forever inactive? And yet your resolution implies their total inactivity.

If you feel differently when exercised with severe temptation, to what you do, when its power is for a season broken, it is no conclusive argument, you were deceived in the matter of your comfort. In the very nature of things, you cannot feel when combating with your spiritual foes, as when you have gained a temporary victory. God wisely calls you to battle against your foes, and by the same wisdom gives you seasons of victory and rejoicing. You should therefore in the time of peace prepare for war. You should expect trials, and stand armed with the gospel armour ready for the combat; and then you will not so hastily conclude, your enjoyments were a delusion; but will be strong to overcome the enemy.

Believers are sometimes tempted to conceal the light and grace they have experienced; lest their brethren and others should expect more of them, than they will be able to perform; or lest they should decline from the grace given, and wound the cause of truth. The tempter often veils his temptations with a pretended concern for the honor of the church, and by this artful method too often prevails. But the subjects of them

should consider, that darkening the light of grace which ought now to shine to others, through fear of declining it in hereafter, is sinning in the present time, for fear of doing it in future. And to sin now, is the readiest method you can take, to be disobedient in time to come. And to wait in a state of *disobedience*, is not the way to prove whether you can be *obedient* hereafter. But if the tempter can make you conceal the grace already bestowed, by making you embrace a *false concern* for the welfare of others, and your own; and that under the notion of its being a *real concern*, he will gain his end in a way in which he is not likely to be detected. It is wrong under any pretence whatever, to hide the gracious gifts of God. They were given not only for your own benefit but for the benefit of others. And while you hide them, you injure not only your own souls, but the souls of your brethren. But though in imitation of David, you declare to all who fear the Lord, what he has done for your souls; or according to the exhortation of Peter, are ready to give to every one who asketh, the reason of the hope within you, yet you should by his direction, do it with *meekness* and *fear*.

When believers are convinced, it is their privilege to enjoy greater gospel blessings, and from such a conviction seek the fulfillment of the promise by prayer and fasting; if the answer is not immediate, they are tempted to give over the pursuit, either under a belief the blessing is not attainable, or that it is not for them. A compliance with the temptation will be followed by wandering and darkness. Let them therefore not give up seeking, but search for the cause, why the promise is delayed. There may be yet some secret bosom sin; some secret power of unbelief or pride, which hinders from giving all up to God. Or he may answer many petitions at once, and fill their hearts with unspeakable strength and comfort.

This temptation may as strongly operate on the minds of believers, with respect to intercessions for others, as in praying for themselves. If they intercede for the salvation of sinners in general, or of their own

children, friends, and acquaintance in particular, and do not see a speedy answer, they may be strongly tempted to give over their intercessions, and all other means of their salvation, under a belief God will never hear. Of all others Christian ministers lie the most open to this temptation. Yet none should yield to it, but sow their seed in the morning, and at evening withhold not their hand, for they know not which may prosper, or whether both will not be fruitful. Their present endeavors may be blest, when they sleep in the silence of the grave. Or they may even live to see the seed sown, spring up and bear an abundant harvest.

When the children of God are convinced of the need of sanctifying grace, and to this end, have a clear sight of their remaining inbred corruptions, satan frequently tempts them to believe, they have never known God's justifying grace. He tells them, so much impurity of heart cannot consist with the divine favor.— But remember, he makes known what is wrong in the hearts, as they are able to bear it; that they may fly to that blood for cleansing, which can make the foulest clean. Let this conviction be improved, that by faith you may lay hold on the promise, which offers a *fulness* to all who *hunger* and *thirst* after righteousness.

The people of God under their afflictions are often *tempted*, to an impatience to be freed. But they should wait calmly, for the time God has appointed for their deliverance. It is of more importance to you, to have grace properly to bear and improve your afflictions, than to be entirely delivered from them. To be supported under them, may so sanctify, as to render them the greatest blessing. But if according to your own desire, you could break away from them, it might prove your ruin. God sees it needful for his people to be tried, and why should you complain! Satan may suggest, if you could see the end of these afflictions, and how they were to terminate for your good, you would have no cause of complaint or anxiety, but as they are now circumstanced, you have real cause for both.

But it will be well to consider, that one of the bright-

est excellencies of the Christian faith, is to confide in God in the darkest hour of affliction, with an assurance, that in so doing, he will conduct your affairs for his own glory and your good. If the event and all connected circumstances were known, there would be little or no trial of your faith; and to grow uneasy because of it, is to wish your faith might never be put to the trial. Had Abraham known, God would have released his son, and accepted for a sacrifice, a ram which his tender faithfulness had provided, what he did, could have been no great trial of his faith. But when he is seen going forward in obedience to the command, although he could see no way for God to accomplish his promise, it can be no subject of wonder to hear the apostle say, "he did not stagger at the promise through unbelief, but was strong in the faith giving glory to God."

Had Daniel certainly known, God would have stopped the mouths of the lions; or the three children, that he would have quenched the violence of the fire; a very small degree of faith and Christian fortitude, would have been sufficient for their support. But as they were ignorant of the method he would take to glorify himself, and save them, and as they calmly confided in him, though thick clouds and darkness rested on the event, there was something in their faith and conduct worthy of imitation.

Were we to examine the scriptures, many like instances might be found, in which the people of God have trusted him in the darkest hour, and have been gloriously delivered. To be impatient of deliverance before the time God appoints, or to wish it in any other way than his wisdom directs, is in effect to wish God may not be glorified, or our own souls benefited. This is impious indeed! But the enemy will labor to keep the impiety of it out of sight, that our souls may be ensnared and overcome. Against this we have need to watch and pray, and in all trials look earnestly to God for supporting grace; and leave the time and manner of deliverance entirely with him; by so doing we may find our trials so sanctified, as to further us in

the way of contentment; otherwise they will prove a great hinderance.

Omission of duty is a no small hinderance to contentment; to all the subjects of it. But very few who decline from God, but first begin by omission of duty. Although they neglect duty, they do not intend to forsake God, but intend by some means so to change the nature of the action, as not to have it imputed as sin; or to be so faithful in some other duty not quite so crossing, as to make amends for these omissions.

Many who profess to be disciples of Christ, have never set up the worship of God in their house, and others have basely discontinued it. Their families are growing up around them, without prayer, or religious instructions; nor do they seem to have any real concern for their own or family's salvation. Such must have an awful account to give, before the judgment seat of Christ. They ought now to consider, how they shall meet the God they have neglected to serve; and with what face they will meet their children, whom they have not taught the fear of God, and before whom they have set such *careless* or impious examples.

The neglect of one duty usually makes way for another. When family worship is neglected, secret worship is usually so too. Meditation and secret prayer are omitted, either because the mind has no taste for them, or because it is too much taken up with some worldly pursuit, to find time to attend to them. On this head many excuse themselves, by alleging that the command to go into their closet and pray to their Father who seeth in secret, means the *closet of the heart*, and thus evade the force of a plain command: and it is to be feared, rarely pray at any time or place. Such cannot reasonably expect to enjoy gospel grace, unless they ask for it. It is no wonder therefore, that they are destitute and discontented.

Many entirely neglect the scripture, or read it in such a careless inattentive way, they gain no instruction. Novels and romances are more esteemed and read than the holy bible. Such disregard that plain command to *search the scriptures*; and yet they would

be thought *good Christians*. They have need to ask themselves, how they can expect to delight in the presence of a holy God above, if they have now more delight in *nonsense*, than in his law and promises. Were they Christian believers, they could say with the Psalmist, "In thy law I delight," and "Thy word is sweet to my taste."

Some neglect the publick worship of God for the most trifling reasons. An indisposition of body, which would not hinder them in the common business of life, will keep them from the house of God. Others spend the sabbath in planning business for the week, in idle visiting, or riding for diversion. And many of these would think us destitute of all charity, if we dared pronounce them not christians. But let them remember, profaning the sabbath, and a neglect of the worship of God, are manifest transgressions of two commandments, under which God will not hold them guiltless.

Too many set light by the ordinances of God. This is a frequent crime and one of no small magnitude. They are ordained by God, to be the ordinary channels of his quickening and comforting grace. Hence those who turn from them, practically say, they disregard the divine authority; and despise, or stand in no need of divine influence. Who has a heart, which will not tremble at such impiety! If these neglectors but seriously thought on their criminality, they would find it very difficult to make their consciences easy.

Christian professors too often neglect their duty, not only toward their own souls; but toward the souls of others. Either through fear or shame they often omit warning, inviting, and instructing others in the things of God as duty requires. When met in visiting circles, the time is spent in evil or unprofitable conversation: and they part without prayer. The time which should be spent to build each other up in faith and holiness, is spent in murdering the characters of the *envied innocent*; or in retailing, and sporting with the faults of the guilty. No Christian ought unnecessarily to visit, where he knows he cannot have a Christian visit. He cannot do it without suffering loss. And if he lives in the

willing practice of it, he cannot come out from the world as the gospel solemnly commands. Time is too precious to be trifled away in fashionable visits and trifling conversation. I appeal to your own experience, whether you ever receive or pay such visits with any spiritual satisfaction. The fear of offending, and drawing on yourselves the ridicule of man, may entice you into them; but this fear must be thrown off, if you would live and walk in gospel liberty. If the time were spent in devotion, which is spent in such visits, how much more spiritual and happy might you be. And when duty calls to meet in the circle of your friends, if you would spend the time in holy conversation, you might leave the place strengthened and comforted in spirit, and rejoicing in the Lord. When you meet therefore, let your conversation be as becomes the gospel. And think, that for every idle word unrepented of, you must give an account in the day of judgment. May God help you to break this common and too fatal snare! Please your own consciences, and obey the command of God, without regard to the frowns and flatteries of men.

To draw you over to their party, they may have many idle pretences and turns, to evade the force of the command; but one plain scripture will infinitely outweigh them all. Therefore obey God rather than man. You cannot in this thing obey both. Be assured when God commands his people to come out from the world, he does not mean, they shall keep up a fashionable and unnecessary intercourse with it. It is true indeed, they cannot be wholly separate from the world, while they are in it. But when duty calls to visit them in sickness, to labor or deal with them; or to pay a friendly visit to our own near relations, who are of this class; it is a very different thing from keeping up a fashionable and needless intercourse with them, in useless conversation; or in any or all of their *common amusements*. The one may be done consistent with duty, the other is *utterly* inconsistent with the spirit and practice of Christianity. This you have long known, but perhaps have not yet put on resolution enough, to reduce it to

practice. May God help you to do it speedily! Go then among Christians, among enquirers after saving grace, and to places where you can have Christian conversation, and God will bless you.

The omission of watchfulness is a great evil, and as great a *hinderance*. Hence we find it so repeatedly and seriously urged in scripture. By getting off our guard, we give satan an opportunity to fill the mind with evil thoughts and tempers. If these are suffered to remain unchecked, they readily cause us to slide into other neglects of duty, improper conversation, the foppery and vanities of the world, and into all manner of evil. If we are so unmindful of our duty and interest, as to slumber like the foolish virgins; we may be assured the enemy does not sleep, but *goes about like a roaring Lion seeking whom he may devour*. He will avail himself of such unwatchful hours, to allure the mind into evil. We have need therefore to resist him steadfast in the faith, by prayer and watchfulness. Let us reflect, how often an unwatchful spirit has given place to unbelief, pride, anger, and many uncharitable expressions, which have afterward cost us many repentant tears and groans. Let us then stand on our guard, and watch unto prayer; look for and haste to the coming of our Lord; that when he appears we may appear with him in glory.

Visiting the sick and afflicted is too much neglected. Many are so engaged in idle and childish diversions; others so taken up with getting riches; or so covetous, that they are afraid they shall be constrained to relieve their distresses if they visit them; and others so lost to humanity, that few are without their excuses, and the afflicted are left to languish out a miserable life; unpitied and unrelieved. But what miserable and disgraceful professors of religion must such be, who will sport and play like children, and yet surrounded with their suffering and dying fellow-men! Or who are to taken up with amassing wealth, as to allow themselves no time to drop the tear of sympathy, or extend the hand of charity! Or studiously keep at a distance, for fear of feeling it a duty to give a little of their treasure!

Or what seems more astonishing, if more can be, are so destitute of humane feelings, as to be entirely unmoved at the sight or hearing of a fellow creature in distress!! Let such no more be called Christians, lest infidels triumph.

This neglect of visiting the sick and afflicted, is adding to their affliction, and often more painful, and harder to be borne, than all other misfortunes united. Make the case your own. And tell me, if you can find words equal to the description, what would be the additional weight of your distress, when borne down with sickness and destitute of the comforts of life; if your friends and acquaintance should refuse you a friendly visit, and that sympathy and relief in their power. The excuses with which you now try to content your own minds, would not be sufficient in your opinion, to justify such a base neglect of duty toward you. And why will you plead them in your own omissions of duty! Were you to go to them, when their minds are tender and susceptible of good impressions, do good to their bodies and deal faithfully with their souls; you might be the happy instruments of leading many of them to the fountain of true happiness. But if you shew ever so much concern for their souls, and do not relieve their outward distresses, when it is in your power; they will have no just reason to believe you have the spirit of Christ: and you greatly deceive yourselves if you believe it.

Shew yourselves Christians then, by seeking out, and sympathizing with, and relieving the distressed. Feed the hungry, cloath the naked. And let neither luxury, prodigality, pride, covetousness, want of humane feelings, or any other hinderance, deprive you of the power and inclination of such thining acts of Christian charity. And labor to do them all from a right temper of heart, if you would worthily bear the name of a Christian. But if destituta of the temper and practice, such no more deserve the name of Christians, than a habitual thief, does that of an honest man. Let such read the 25th chapter of Matthew, and tremble at their approaching fate.

It may be proper here to remark, that the law of charity does not bind you to be the supporters of idleness. If you bestow any of your gifts on the idle, they should be accompanied with a plain reprimand for their indolence, and an energetic exhortation to honesty and industry, or else to avoid your presence. But the wife and children of an intemperate or lazy man, may be real and proper objects of charity. For why should they be left to starve or freeze, because they are so unhappy as to have an indolent husband and father !

And while it is in your power, you ought to be the more ready and instant in the work of charity, because you know not, but you may need help. There may be a change of circumstances. You may become poor, and such as you have relieved, may be in a state to help you. If they have not suffered the loss of humanity by a change of circumstances, they will feel themselves obliged to reach the hand of charity to you. And others who have known your former kindness to the poor, will be compassionately moved to help you. And you will have the heart-felt satisfaction of reflecting, that you behaved as stewards of God, while it was in your power. You may also gain their prayers, which may be answered in everlasting blessings on your souls. Therefore in whatever view you consider it, there are many proper motives to stir you up to this duty; and as many weighty things to deter from a neglect of it.

The scripture has made *self examination* a duty; therefore the omission of it must be an evil; and a hinderance to the happiness of *contentment*. But some may fear to enter seriously and closely into this duty, lest they should be found too far in the *rear*.—Like a merchant who suspects himself a bankrupt, and will not examine his affairs, lest he should find it true. Others may neglect the duty out of a vain and presumptuous confidence, that all things are well, and that they have no need to enquire into their state. Others may be too indolent and forgetful, to call themselves to a strict account respecting their state and progress in grace. While some may be so deluded with *antinomian dreams*, as to think all this to be mere *servility*, and inconsistent with *gospel liberty*.

But however so plain a duty may be neglected; those who are guilty of it, will be found great losers. They might become eminent for piety; but instead of this, it is to be feared, many of them will never realize their state, until the light of eternity forces them to feel. But it would be infinitely better to know now, that if they find themselves deceived, they may have an opportunity to escape the deception, and become the disciples of truth. Let it be considered in any spiritual view, and they must be deeply convinced, the duty is of importance, and, that it is very dangerous to neglect it. Enter upon it therefore immediately, and endeavor to know daily, the state of your affections towards God, and whether you are advancing or declining in the *way of contentment*. Without which you will find it difficult, if not impossible to grow in grace, or to meet death with the courage of an assured conqueror.

Perhaps no one duty is more omitted, and the omission attended with greater evil, than the laboring in a gospel manner with those, who have offended against the rules of God's house. Yet as much as this evil prevails, and as many excuses as the committers of it make in their own vindication, there is no duty more clearly revealed in the gospel; nor any one more solemnly enforced. St. Paul says, "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye who are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted." Four things are worthy of notice in this scripture. (1.) The persons who are to restore the offender again to fellowship—they who are **SPIRITUAL**—that is, such as have the spirit of Christ, for none others are capable of acting or judging as they ought on this or any other case, which comes before the church. (2.) These are to **RESTORE** him—to perform all necessary labor with him, and when he discovers proper marks of repentance, take him again into Christian fellowship. (3.) The manner in which it is to be done—in the **SPIRIT** of **MEEKNESS**. All *roughness* must be carefully avoided, and the spirit of love, tenderness, and humility, must temper, and ap-

pear in all which is done or said concerning him. (4.) CONSIDER THYSELF lest thou also be *tempted*—thou art exposed to the same snare, or one equally dangerous. Remember, although he has fallen, thou art not beyond the reach of temptation, or the possibility of falling; therefore boast not, but be humble.

The direction given by our Lord is equally expressive. “If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault, betwixt thee and him alone—If he will not hear thee take one or two more—If he will not hear them, tell it to the church.” Notwithstanding these directions are so plain, many excuse their neglects in the following manner.—“They are intoxicated with anger or *spirits*, when they offend, and shall I rebuke them then?” Perhaps not in all cases. Yet it will be sometimes your duty to reason with an angry man; and when mild reasoning has made him calm, he may be rebuked for his folly. But if there are some cases, when it would be improper to reprove, at the time and place where the offence is committed; it is no argument, it should never be done afterwards. Conscience and scripture will decide this, by condemning those, who take refuge in such absurd excuses. “They will be offended with me.” How do you know this? Instead of it they might be brought to repentance, and their souls saved. And will you ruin your own souls by neglect of duty; and let others go peaceably to hell, for fear of offending them? Who taught you this fear? It must have been the grand accuser of the brethren, for it is not justified, but condemned by the gospel.

“It will do no good.” Was Christ not wise enough to have seen this, were it real? If he assigned no such reason for neglecting the duty of reproof, who gave disobedient man authority to do it? “I have no gift for reproofing.” Do you then charge God with requiring that of you, which he has given you no ability to perform? The excuse certainly implies this: For God has said, “Thou shalt in any wise rebuke.” But you in effect say, he has given you no ability for it. But what is this better than saying, “I knew thee to be an austere man, reaping where thou hadst not straw-

ed?" Beware then lest the lot of the disobedient and unprofitable servant be your portion! May you seasonably take warning!

Such neglects of duty lessen the sense of the divine goodness, and deeply wound the spirit of brotherly kindness. Hardness against an offender unavoidably follows. For a while, the neglecter may pretend to fellowship as before. But it is all hypocrisy, and really increases his want of fellowship for the *first offender*, till he views all he says or does with an evil, jealous eye. Here begins a distance of spirit and conduct, expressive of the temper of the mind; which is soon discovered and practiced by the other. Their shyness grows into a settled hatred, and it will be almost a miracle, if they can be again reconciled. But had he gone to the offender as duty called, the breach might have been healed; or if not, he might have done his own duty, and enjoyed gracious communion with God.

Many instead of rebuking the offender, whisper, or report the offence to others. And it is no uncommon thing, for friends and foes to have the whole as a common report, before the offender hears any thing of it. And the first he hears of it, he may be told of it by way of reproach; and be irritated, not only by the manner in which it is told him; but, that his brethren have been so evil, as to tattle his faults through the whole circle of his acquaintance. This vile unscriptural practice, has occasioned in the church divisions and tumults almost without number. Those who are guilty of this evil, pretend to vindicate their conduct by saying, they were so burdened, they could not avoid opening their minds to a confidential friend.—And so they commit another known sin, to ease themselves of the guilt of the first!! How much better would it have been, to have gone to the offender in love and meekness, according to the plain direction of our Lord!

This omission brings darkness, and the sin of *whispering* not only increases it; but lays a heavy and very unnecessary burden on the whole church, and perhaps becomes the foundation, not only of the apostacy of the person who first offended; but of a difficulty and di-

vision which may discourage many. How alarming the consideration!

No person can be so fit to administer the first reproof, as he who is knowing to the offence. If the *offended* report it, and an individual or the church undertake to reprove, it can only be by *hearsay*, and such is the nature of man, he will not bear reproofs of this kind, like those founded on real knowledge. Indeed he has good reason to say, "Why do you not call those transgressors to an account, who by telling my faults, have been as guilty as myself? I no more deserve reproof and excommunication than they. And why am I condemned, and they passed by unnoticed? And if they had aught against me, why did they not come themselves? Have they been so long guilty of spreading my faults contrary to scripture, that they are ashamed to see me?"

It is common for some members, to run with all their trials of this kind to their ministers and tell them,—"Such a brother was angry—another is proud—another covetous and unkind—another has but little religion"—and the like complaints. But we have good reason to suspect, that those who thus complain, are guilty of what they charge on others. And if every minister would reprove all such with great plainness and tenderness, this growing and distressing evil might be cured. I am persuaded if some method is not taken to prevent its progress, it will soon become the cause of incurable wounds. May we not believe, that at least one half of the *backslidings*, are occasioned by the sin of *whispering*? Are we who profess to be ministers of Christ wholly free from this evil? Let us in all things be examples for the flock, and never rest till we have expelled this heinous sin from the church.

Talebearing and *whispering* is a monster, which begs at the door of almost every heart, among many he finds full entertainment; and very few have courage to form and execute designs against his life. May the ministers of Christ by the sword of the spirit wound him unto death: nor would I have the *deadly wound healed*, lest all the world should wonder after the beast.

But many are deceived, by supposing it is not an evil, to report the faults of others, if in doing it, they put on a tone of sorrow. Under pretence of mourning for their follies they commit many heinous sins; and with a voice and look of distress make a business of talebearing, and carry it on to such a degree, it is much to be feared, they will exclude themselves from the kingdom of grace and glory.

Others commit this evil by way of enquiry. "Have you heard that brother A. or sister S. has been guilty of such or such a crime?" Mixing a tone of distress with all they say. In this way of dealing with offenders, whole societies may spend the time, which should be spent in devotion; and in mournful complaints one to another, tell their fears of coming to nought, and never take one gospel step to escape the threatening danger. Such for wisdom, resemble the man who would lift his hands over his head, to avoid being crushed by a falling mountain. They *display* their *mighty courage*, by talking over the offender's faults in his absence; and deliver many serious charges to keep the whole secret from him; and so part with exhortations to disobedience; and with doleful complaints of a barrenness and trials! They make shift to bear his membership as timorous people do the tooth ache. They look on him as an offender; but never tell him he has offended. They call him brother; but account him an enemy of the cross of Christ. Or else they fall into the other extreme, and wish to push him headlong out of the church, without ceremony or affection. It is no wonder, that such so often cry, "O my leanness! O my leanness!"

THERE are some things interwoven with the very constitutions of men, which religion will never wholly irradicate. From these constitutional peculiarities many things may flow, which are offensive to one of a different constitutional turn, though perfectly innocent to the other. One may naturally be of a melancholy habit, and though he may enjoy a good degree of Christian cheerfulness, yet this may never be wholly done away, but produce several things disagreeable to one of

a different habit. Another may naturally be of a cheerful and lively turn; and though he may possess a good share of Christian solemnity; yet there will be a vivacity of temper and conversation, which will not correspond with the feelings of the other. And these have need to set up a strong watch, or they will fall into an unhappy censuring of each other's conduct. Christians should always calculate on making a charitable allowance for these natural, constitutional *bias*es. Though the allowance should never be so great, as to make *melancholy* pass for Christian sobriety; or a vain *levity* for Christian cheerfulness. And yet it is certain, that the manners of these different persons will never appear exactly alike; although they both may have the mind which was in Christ.

Nearly the same may be said concerning some things, which originate from different modes and circumstances of education. What in one place would be considered civility and sufficiently polite, would in another be looked on as clownish awkwardness; and were these to practice some manners, which others can and do practice consistently with humility; they would not only spring from pride in them, but become the occasions of an increase of it. And on the other hand, whatever they see in others, which goes beyond their prescribed rules of politeness; they hastily impute it all to pride, and conformity to the world. Although I would say nothing in favor of a *sinful* conformity to the fashions and customs of the world; but use all evangelical methods to discourage them; yet I am well convinced, there should be Christian charity exercised with respect to things, which originate from different manners of education.

But for the want of such a charitable allowance, when we see the fruits of a constitutional bias, or one given by education; we too hastily ascribe all to a bad intention, and call it a premeditated evil. And under the influence of this want of Christian *lenity*, and the unfaithfulness of each other above described; we are too often hindered from going to them in love, to enquire for our own information, and to advise them for

their good; and though they are loving disciples of Christ; yet our negligence induces us to believe, they are intentional, if not obstinate offenders. Such a view of them, together with our neglect of duty, begets many wrong tempers towards them; and unless we are brought to repentance, we are never fit afterwards, to perform a scriptural labor with them. By this also we are hindered from progressing in the Way of contentment.

When some professors grow cold in religion, they are inclined to think all others so too; although they do not properly realize, that this is the case with themselves. In this state they fall on others with censures, exhortations, and threatenings, without any appearance of mercy. There is no sign of tenderness or love, either in their exhortations or prayers. Although there may be times, when backsliders may be reprov'd with some degree of severity; yet even this ought to be tempered with the utmost love and humility: but generally an encouraging and inviting manner of address, will be most effectual; unless they are deeply lost to all moral feelings.

I need here hardly observe, that most of these are crimes, for which there can be no well grounded excuse. And the rest are such as should be carefully shunned as *hinderances* to contentment. What can be more plain than the direction of Christ, Matt. 18th? And of the apostle, Gal. 6th? No one can mistake who is willing to know and do his Master's will. These are as plain, as "Thou shalt not kill." And yet multitudes live in the habitual breach of these rules, and yet have the boldness to call themselves by the name of Christ.

There is yet another error into which some fall, when they pretend to *deal* with an offending member. They seem to have no other end in view, than to obtain evidence enough to prove him guilty of the crime he is charged with, and then to expel him from the church. But this is utterly wrong. They indeed should be careful not to accuse a brother without proper evidence; but before they even intimate as if he must

go out of the church, let every possible and probable step be taken to reconcile and restore him. And if all proves ineffectual, he must be expelled.

Some are too much inclined to believe *flying* and *idle* reports against their brethren. And by so doing get jealousy and hardness against them, when perhaps there is not a syllable of truth in all they have heard. The wicked, many times, make and retail slander, on purpose to disturb and divide the church. And if they can make the members listen to, and believe their reports against each other, they will not fail to give them *wholesale* supplies. It is an undeniable fact, that some of those, who in all other respects are men of truth; are nevertheless such enemies to religion, that they do not hesitate to slander its professors. But if you have reason to believe the things reported, go to the accused person in love, and enquire into the truth of them for yourselves, and if you find them true, and after suitable labor he does not forsake the offence, bring it in gospel *order* before the church, that he may be *dealt* with according to the discipline of the house of God. And by a neglect of this method, see you do not keep it festering in your heart, till it grows into an incurable sore: neither make it more public than the wicked themselves, by enquiring every where, whether others have heard of it.

Some, in attempting to impress the minds of others with the real need of heart holiness, do it too much by way of terror. They cannot fail to be unsuccessful. It will rather tend to their discouragement than to their help. Consequently, will more or less *linder* both in the way of contentment. However carnal professors may be addressed like those of the Asiatic churches; yet in applying the doctrine of holiness to believers, it should be done by way of instruction and encouragement. They should be told the blessing is for them; that God has promised it, and able and willing to fulfill the promise; that the blood of Christ is efficacious, and the spirit of grace powerful to effect the work. If through the spirit of wisdom and holiness, you are become stronger than others, remember the *strong* are

to bear the *infirmities* of the *weak*; to *strengthen* the *weak* hands, *confirm* the *feeble* knees, and help support them under all their burdens. Therefore in all your addresses be compassionate and mild. If you enjoy superior grace, be the more humble and forbearing; and shew yourselves *fathers* and *leaders* in Israel; and do not resemble imperious and merciless slave-drivers.

Many neglect their meetings of Christian fellowship. Although bound by solemn covenant to meet with their brethren, to encourage, and watch over them; yet falling off by degrees, forget or rashly break their covenant vows; despise and neglect the blessings which were formerly enjoyed, when they were faithful to meet together. Such cannot be reckoned among the faithful; or even be considered as *pressing* after contentment. But notwithstanding this is so evident a breach of gospel rules, yet they have their excuses, and hope to be yet thought good Christians. They plead worldly care and business; or, that there are some who *meet*, they cannot fellowship; or something else equally trifling. As to the first, there may be times, when duty so loudly calls in the concerns of life, that it would not be right to leave them; but these instances with most people seldom occur. And generally those who most plead them, have so little relish for the worship of God, they are glad to lay hold on any thing to excuse their neglect. If the concerns of life interfere with religious duties, and make men less holy than they otherwise would be; one of two things must be true: they have either taken on themselves unnecessary cares; or they attend to their lawful concerns with a wrong spirit and view. Consequently their excuses are so far from rendering their neglect justifiable, that they only make them the more criminal.

As to the *last*, it seems but a weak pretence, to forsake the company of many they profess to love, because they are tried with one or two; and by so doing cut themselves off from the blessing of meeting with their brethren, and from all the strength and comfort which usually flow from such meetings. If any have offended, there is a proper way to reclaim them, or if irreclaim-

able, to expell them from the church. And if others absent themselves from the church and its privileges, without attending to this method, it will appear to all serious believers, that they are as much or more in the fault, than those they accuse. If there are real offenders in the church, the truly faithful will unite to bring them to repentance, or cut them off according to the order of gospel discipline. And none will desert the church on such trifling pretences, but cowards and the lukewarm.

That I am not mistaken in the character of such men, will appear, when we undertake to reprove them. They will bear no reproof. But begin to tell that others conduct as bad as they, and yet are not reprov'd. And if poor they will perhaps add, the rich are *favoured* and *visited*, but they are reprov'd and neglected. But let such remember, their excuses will avail them nothing, when the light of eternity pours in upon their consciences, and they are summoned before the tribunal of an impartial judge. Learn therefore to think church privileges of more consequence, than to neglect them for such childish reasons. Be zealously and perseveringly engaged, to give up your account with joy, and not with grief.

We have already noticed a number of omissions of duty; and some of the miserable excuses made by these criminal neglectors, and by which they add criminality to guilt. It is to be devoutly wished, that instead of pursuing a way so evil and unhappy, they will confess and forsake, and earnestly engage in the pursuit of contentment. But as the case now stands with them, it is a matter of no surprize to find them make so little progress in the Way of Happiness, or that they continue so restless and discontented. Such have no more right to expect the happiness of the gospel; than a traveller has to look for the end of his journey, when he slumbers away his whole time on the road.

But as there are various other *hinderances* to contentment, it is now time to pass on and consider another class, which are the sins of commission. These also stand opposed to contentment, as well as those of o-

mission. It may not be amiss however here to remark, that the involuntary mistakes in judgment and errors in practice, inseparably connected with the ignorance and infirmities of our natures, are not to be classed with either. When I speak of the sins of omission, I mean the neglect of plain and known duty. And I mean by the sins of commission, such acts as conscience and the spirit of God join to testify, are breaches of the plain precepts of the gospel.

We are now led to notice those actions, which are thus testified to be evil. *To hate God and our fellow-men are of this class.* Though many in heart really hate God, yet few will own or justify themselves in it. —But do not blush to confess they hate their enemies. And under the influence of that temper seek all possible evil against them. Let such remember, they trample on that well known command, which makes it their duty to love their enemies, to bless their persecutors, and pray for such as despitefully use them. The love of God and man is the soul of religion. And were I to be asked to define pure and undefiled religion, I could not do it better than by saying, *it is the love of God shed abroad in the heart and acted out in the life.* He then who lives in the habitual hatred of God or man, is destitute of all religion: And thus remaining, can neither be *contented* nor happy. This evil might have been considered before, and viewed as the luxuriant soil from which all other hinderances spring. But if is only treated as a single and separate hinderance, it will be found to be neither a small nor an uncommon one.

The law of Christ has made *profane swearing* an evil. But many blaspheme the name of God, or take it in vain; with as much seeming delight, as if it were a commanded duty. And if to be *condemned* and *cast off* by God, were salvation, and the only state of happiness, they could not more repeatedly and earnestly pray for it. Being so familiar with oaths, they mix them with their common conversation; and attempt to confirm the most simple relation of facts, by the profane and useless repetition of an oath. By this method of conversation

they sin against God ; render their own souls unhappy ; give others reason to suspect them falsehood ; break over all rules of politeness and correct speaking ; unfit themselves for evidences in courts of justice ; and make themselves infamous and ridiculous before all serious and well-bred people. Nor will any but the most infamous and depraved, plead any thing in vindication of a practice so unscriptural and opposite to the interests of good society : even if this world is the only stage of our existence. I say, *opposite* to the *interests* of good society, because it is an undeniable fact, that such a familiarity with oaths and the name of God, has a direct tendency to make men *trifle* with them even before a court of justice, and in all covenant engagements. And in proportion as this evil prevails, we lose the benefit of judicial courts, and covenants ; and with them, two of the best bonds of civil society. This evil is so pernicious, Christians, ministers of religion, and parents should unite for its destruction ; or they will be *hindered* in the Way of Happiness. May we with one consent arm ourselves against this horrid foe ; and may God lead us to the battle and give us the victory.

Fraud and *theft* are condemned by laws human and divine. And if professed infidels only, transgressed them, I should not need to say so much on the subject. But I am sorry to say, too many professed Christians are daily guilty of the first. They calculate on taking every possible advantage, and escape the lath of civil law. They have little or no regard to the law of God, nor would they to that of man, were it not for corporal punishment and present disgrace. And what adds to their criminality, they justify themselves in the practice, by pretending, if others do not take care of their own interest, they are under no obligation to do it ; but have a right to take all they can get.

Perhaps the persons thus defrauded, were not made by God sufficiently discerning to see the fraud : consequently you took advantage of their ignorance. But did God give you superior abilities to defraud and ruin others ? Would it not be the part of a rational and humane creature to defend and assist them ?—Or

perhaps he had such confidence in your honesty because you professed to be a Christian, he did not suspect you would try to defraud him of his just right, by veiling the imperfections of your commodities; and by exalting their good qualities, higher than would consist with truth. But no one act of fraud is more black, than that of making the necessitous circumstances of men, an opportunity of exorbitant interests; and thereby strip them of the little they possess, and leave themselves and families in a state of want and wretchedness: or put them in prison for not answering a demand, which in the eye of strict justice has nothing in it more binding than fraud or robbery. This is no uncommon evil. And though the perpetrators of it take measures to secrete themselves from the eye of the law, yet they are no better than highwaymen! They may see their picture and their end, by reading the first part of the 5th chapter of James.

Drunkeness and all other kinds of intemperance is forbidden by the law of God. And yet many who profess faith in Christ, are guilty of more or less intemperance. Some are mere sots. They place themselves below the swine which wallow in the mire. They spend their estates, distress their families, ruin their characters; and it is to be feared, will ruin their souls.—Those who go further in dress than is decent and comfortable; eat, drink, or sleep, more than health requires; or eat and drink what they know is contrary to health, for no other reason but to please the taste, are guilty of intemperance, just in the same proportion as they go beyond the plain rules of the gospel, which require all things to be used for the glory of God. Although at present they do not go to the excess just named, yet they may be laying a foundation for it, and in time be equally the slaves of intemperance; unless they resolve through grace, to regulate themselves according to the gospel.—It is very easy to unfit the mind for devotion, by too much indulgence in sleep; by taking too large a quantity of food or drink; or by taking that kind, which will not agree with the constitution. To avoid this evil, some will need no small

share of resolution; especially, such as are by duty called into many different places and companies. But there is no better way, than for a man to study his own constitution, the quantity and quality of food which best suits him; and then fix on his rule, and never transgress it, unless imperious necessity demands. In this way, he may keep in the path of gospel self-denial without injury to himself or others.

Adultery and *fornication* are evils to which the gospel gives no license; but are every where condemned in the most awful manner. Yet many commit them, and carry on the *dark intrigues of libertinism*, as if they were the most laudable and interesting pursuits in the world. These evils are gloried in, as if they were the only way to honor; and as if men were created for no other purpose. Some chuse the dark shades of night to pay their beastly worship to their lecherous goddess; while others have grown so perfect in their brutal attainments, they were not ashamed to worship in the light of noon-day. These miscreants artfully seek the ruin of female virtue and modesty; and when it is accomplished, they glory in the achievment, as if they had restored a sinking and ruined world. To effect their more than diabolical designs, they pretend the strongest and purest affection, make the most solemn vows of constancy; and when the unhappy, unsuspecting creature is taken in the artful and too fatal snare, they leave her friendless and wretched; and perhaps to complete her misery, call her a *fool* for believing them, and shout for joy and victory, as if they deserved a burst of universal applause.

We cannot have a more finished picture of human depravity, than a female, who is so lost to that delicacy and modesty, by which the Creator has characterized her sex, as to become an unblushing actress and leader in these base intrigues. The time was when she shuddered at such a character, and in heart detested the crime. But having been drawn into the evil by the wicked intrigues of others; or having unwatchfully and basely begun to trifle, with what should have been held the inviolable glory of her sex; she has sunk by

flow degrees, till impudence, universal depravity, and disgrace, are the prevailing traits in her character. Let those who were created for nobler purposes, act up to the native dignity of their character; and they will be justly entitled to our esteem; and considered as the chief ornaments of the lower creation;—as the healer of our woes and partners of our bliss.

If any thing can be more disgraceful to human nature, it must be an adulterous breach of the marriage covenant. We can hardly conceive of any covenant more solemn and binding. Those who are guilty of a voluntary breach of it, are guilty of the blackest kind of perjury. If they cannot be trusted for the fulfilment of such an engagement; they are capable of all breaches of trust. And yet with many, few things are more trifled with, and less regarded. Even the famous, polite Lord C—d himself, did nothing better, than teach his son the art and propriety of seduction. And it is to be feared, there are many who as little regard the law of God and man; and their own most solemn engagements. Whatever unlawful liberties they may take, but few of them would grant their *Partners* and daughters the same; though they cannot in justice say they have not an equal right.

It is not to be doubted, but in their own minds at least, they attempt some mode of defence for their evil conduct. But whatever method of excuse is pursued, they cannot plead for it on the authority of God's word; for that repeatedly forbids it, on the pain of everlasting condemnation. And they have as little reason to plead for it on the principle of its utility. What benefit can arise from it? Can it be of service to mankind to break the most solemn vows; to trample on all laws human and divine; and to introduce a course of things, which if it were universally to prevail, would leave our children without friends, support, instruction and government! If the sacred ties of wedlock were universally disregarded, it cannot be denied, but all these evils and many more, would rush on the world like an impetuous torrent. But to speak out plainly; (though I say nothing here of Christian precepts,) what man

of feeling and honor, could think it a favor to have his wife and daughters become shameless prostitutes? Would he not recoil at the idea, and wish there might be at least one exception to the general practice of libertinism? And if he would wish this in the regard of his own wife and daughters, might not the fraternity to which he belongs, wish the same concerning theirs, and with equal propriety? And if this wish were universally to be accomplished, there would be an end of a practice too opposite to all society happiness.—Why do they wish this exception to the principle and practice of libertinism? It must be either because they consider it an evil or disgrace. If it is either, why do they practice and plead for it in themselves? But to bring it to a single point. It is either a virtue or vice. If it is a virtue, why do they not wish their wives and daughters made virtuous by a full renunciation of all female chastity? And if it is a vice, why do they not reform, and set a better example to their families and the world?

If it cannot be plead for, from the word of God, or from its utility, what plea shall be made?—One, and one only remains. “Nature (say they) has given the appetite, and nature should be obeyed.” Suppose nature (as it is called) had given the appetite to their *companions* and children, would they recommend it to them, to obey it? If their argument is good they ought to do it.

The young Prince of Troy no doubt reasoned in the same way, when he wantonly stole the beautiful Grecian Princess; for which he paid a ten years seige, the destruction of the city, the loss of liberty, and the blood of the citizens. Nor can we suppose but Herod was of the same opinion, when he formed his illicit connexion with his brother’s wife; which was followed by the murder of a good man.

But let their method of reasoning in vindication of this practice have a universal application, and who could number or weigh the evils which would unavoidably follow!—Some men have also an appetite for wealth, and if it is right to follow nature in the other case, it is

in this. It must therefore be right for them to steal, rob, defraud, and pursue any other method of deceit or violence, which their appetite for wealth might lead them to, that it might be fully satisfied. These practices they cannot condemn, while they plead for and practice the other. And were they universally to take place, who could be safe? who could be happy? universal ruin and horror must follow.—Cities laid in ashes, the world deluged in blood, and nothing could be realized, but desolation and misery.

Do you like the picture, O ye libertines of the age! Or do you not rather turn from it with horror and disgust? No wonder you cannot bear your own likenesses! And if it be so shocking to you, when drawn by an unskilful, human hand; how must it appear in the day of judgment, when portrayed by the hand of an infinite and eternal Judge! You have already some faint whispers of that day in the court of your own consciences. And what conscience now faintly whispers, it will then speak out in the loudest accents of terror and distress. Be resolved then from this hour, that reason and scripture shall be your guide; and you can no more plead for an evil so dreadful, than you can wish an incendiary to burn your houses over your heads.

Lying is an evil, in vindication of which, few are so depraved as to plead; and yet it is no uncommon evil. Some previous and shameful criminality, may lead men to falsehood, to cover their disgrace. But they had better confess and forsake their sin. This method often proves unsuccessful, and afterwards they are obliged to submit to the deep and lasting disgrace of having the crime known, and of having lied to conceal it. But should they escape being detected by man, the whole will be brought to light by a heart-searching Judge.

Envy may be allowed to beget falsehood. The envious will not endure and equal or superior. They will propagate falsehood to blast his reputation, or eclips his character, that he may sink into disgrace, and, that they may be exalted and triumph in his ruin. It is impossible to conceive of any thing more like the

grand *Accufar*: And yet it is a common evil. A trifling to be accounted the greatest beauty, the greatest wit, or a wish to be thought the most skilful and wise in one's profession, has often given rise to this kind of falshood.

The fpirit of malice or revenge, too often proves a fruitful fource of lying. If one is injured by another, he retaliates by falshood and flander. He accounts it the fweeteft and moft effectual revenge. But it often recoils on his own head. He is proved a liar and an enemy to truth, and the perfon he attempted to flander, is found clear of thofe flanderous accusations. Confequently, he finks into difgrace, and the other to his great mortification, is the more eſteemed and honored. But if the evil is not difcovered here, the righteous Judge at laſt ſhall vindicate the injured and condemn the guilty.

Many are induced to depart from the law of truth, for the fake of gain. They over-rate their own things, and give them qualities they do not poſſeſs, with a deſign to get more than their value; and they underrate the things of others, either to keep their own in credit, or to get them below their worth. By this method ſome defraud others of their right, and heap up wealth in abundance. But wealth ſo gotten, muſt be painful in its final confequences. It muſt prove a bed of thorns to a dying man; and a ſword of exquisite torture to a condemned ſoul.

Some make falſe declarations with a view to make themſelves honorable. They boaſt of an honorably line of anceſtry, learning, riches, and other accompliſhments they do not poſſeſs. To poſſeſs theſe they ſuppoſe would make them honorable: And in order to be crowned with their fancied honor and dignity, they affirm themſelves poſſeſſors of things to which they have not the moſt indirect claim. But,

“ Honor and ſhame, from no condition riſe,”

“ Act well your part, there all the honor lies.”

But how deſpicable muſt ſuch appear, when their pitiful falshood is diſcovered, and they are ſeen naked of all thoſe robes of honor, with which they pretended to be

clothed : and it is hardly possible for them long to escape this disgrace. But suppose they carry out the cheat through life, what will their false appearances of honor avail them, when every mouth shall be stopped, and all the *world* appear guilty before God !

Others have a peculiar faculty of leaving false impressions on the minds of those who hear them ; and without saying the words commonly used to make such impressions — They do it by tones, and gestures.—The impressions made, are exactly such as they intended. But when charged with falsehood, they pretend to be innocent. But let them remember, if the hearers received the ideas they intended, and if those were not true, they have as really lied, as if they had used the very words, which are the common and known signs of those ideas. There is perhaps no other kind of falsehood which more prevails, and which does more real mischief. Such a liar contrives beforehand for a place of retreat, and after he has stirred up a great deal of strife and hatred, he intends by casting the falsehood on others, to go off in triumph. But the day is approaching, when the enemies of truth shall be uncovered, and appear in their true character.

Others do violence to the truth, by speaking a few disrespectful things of absent persons, in a kind of sorrowful tone ; and indirectly hints, something very disgraceful remains untold, which they chuse to conceal out of pure respect for those persons. By this mode of conduct they raise in the minds of others a thousand jealousies, and conjectures, which often do the slandered as great an injury in the eyes of men, as if these conjectures were really true. And yet these insinuating, deceitful monsters of the world, will wipe their mouths from the guilt of lying, by pretending they have never said any thing scandalous. But let such consider, they cannot escape the eye of Jehovah, or the cognizance of his holy law. They must be judged at last as guilty of falsehood, and as enemies of truth.

Many lie foolishly, when the truth would do better, even if there were nothing criminal in lying. They do it when it is entirely unnecessary, even if it were in

itself a virtue. They have no inducement to it, or any determinate end in view. The things they invent and spread are so weak and foolish, they would be a disgrace to them if true, and are much more so, as they are false. Other kinds of falsehood may be more mischievous; but none can bear stronger marks of folly. It must be considered as a sure evidence of a weak and depraved mind. Did they but realize the things of time and eternity as they ought, they would find topics of conversation enough to employ their tongues, without having recourse to such low and disgraceful things.

There is also a kind of *fashionable, polite lying*, which is called by the *soft* name of *jesting*: In which many laughable things, are said with a design to excite mirth. They sport with the infirmities of others; and what was said in *jest*, is often taken, and afterwards told in *earnest*; by which the innocent sufferers have their infirmities converted into faults of the blackest hue; or if they have been guilty of any trifling faults, they are lifted up to the highest summit of evil. This kind of evil is no where more practiced, than among dining and tea-table parties. But when charged with the crime, they attempt an excuse by saying they were not in *earnest*. This frivolous excuse neither exculpates them from the charge of falsehood, nor prevents the mischief it has occasioned.—If men are ever ironical, let vice, and not the persons of the innocent be the subject of their irony. Let it be sparingly seriously, and cautiously used; and never degraded into despicable buffoonery. Jesting is a species of lying; and even irony is a barbed arrow, and should never be played with, lest it miss the guilty and wound the innocent.

Some put a false colouring on truth, or magnify beyond all bounds, what is true in its simple form. This may arise from the love they have, of always dealing in the *marvellous*. They seem to have no liking to simple and unexaggerated descriptions. By their manner of relating things, we should be ready to think the smallest insect to be a monster for its shape and bigness, and a mote to be a world: "But let your yea, be yea,

and your nay, be nay, for whatsoever is more cometh of evil."

There is yet another kind of falsehood, which consists in breach of promise to God: and one from which perhaps no son or daughter of Adam is entirely clear. In the time of sickness and distress men promise to reform, but when God in mercy removes the affliction, they disregard their solemn vow, and practice former evils. Under sermons, at funerals, and on other solemn occasions, they make religious resolutions, but they soon pass away like the early cloud and morning dew. It is not a trifling crime thus to treat Jehovah and their promissory engagements. But though so desperately guilty, few seem concerned for their state, only when chastised by providence. And then to renew their vows, and commonly break them again when saved out of their trouble. Whatever such may now think, it is certain their broken resolutions and murdered hours, will one day stare them in the face; and unless repentance prevent, will be charged home on their consciences with unutterable pain.

The gospel commands to live in peace; and forbids to stir up strife and contention. But many disregard it, and in this respect are just the reverse of what they should be. They not only *make* and *retail* slander, but are busy in running from house to house, with a seeming friendly and innocent anxiety, to know all the secrets of others, and what they think of the character of their neighbors. Beware of such. When any person presses you for your secrets, and opinion of your neighbors; be assured he has no other design, than to spread them, and put the whole neighborhood in a state of uproar and confusion: and especially, if under the mask of friendship he relates what others say against you; and at the same time makes many unasked and solemn protestations, to keep all you tell him, in a state of profound secrecy. You may as well set the *fox to guard the geese*, as to trust your secrets or opinion with such people.

You may find a few confidants, to whom you may unbosom yourselves with safety: But they are very

few. All *good people* are not capable of such special intimacy. Though they have no intention of being false to their trust, yet such is their mind, and confidence in all their acquaintance, that they unwarily make *intimates* of all, and commit their own secrets and yours to them, by which means the whole is published to the world.

Therefore select your friends, and faithfully prove them, before you place in them too much confidence. This will require both discernment and firmness. Study their natural tempers. Consider what grace has done for them. Mark well on what their friendship toward you is founded. If it is founded on *interest*, they will desert and betray you in adversity. If it is founded on the love of flattery, they will be your friends no longer than you pay them in their own coin. If it is founded on the love of novelty, a few weeks or months at most will make it sicken and die with old age. If on beauty, the eclipses of disease, or the wrinkles of age, will make it go out in darkness like an expiring taper. And if it rests on some favors bestowed and others expected, it will change into ingratitude and reproach, when you cease to answer their expectations in bestowing favors. But if it is founded in the love of God and man, and arises out of a heart formed to friendship; and sacredly regarding, and loving peace, and willing to *weep* as well as *rejoice*, (when all this is proved,) trust him as your friend.

But in so nice and rare a choice you will need firmness; because those who ask no other price for *their friendship*, than to be entrusted with all your secrets, will undoubtedly be affronted, and charge you with want of confidence. The charge is *just*, and it is your duty to prove it so, by refusing to confide in them. Only furnish them with materials, by resigning your secrets, and they will alter, mix, and frame them in such a manner as to erect a *temple of confusion*, and an altar to *sacrifice* the peace of a whole town or nation; and they will make you if possible, worship at the feet of the Goddess Contention, in all the fervency of infuriated zeal. Those then who would travel in the Road to

Happiness, must not only avoid being actors in these scenes of strife; but carefully shun such as are, or they will be entangled in grievous difficulties, and hindered in their Heavenly Journey. And one necessary method of shunning them is, to weigh and follow what is here said of the choice of intimate friends.

Young people are often hindered in the Road to Happiness, by the hasty and inconsiderate manner in which they form their matrimonial connexions. They are drawn into the bonds of wedlock by riches, beauty, or a strong and sudden fancy. But these cannot lay the lasting foundation of friendship.

*“Two kindered souls alone must meet,
'Tis friendship makes the bondage sweet.”*

But O! the cursed charm of gold! The fading flower of beauty! The ungovernable rage of fancy! How many are ruined by you!

If the young and unwary only were deceived, and entangled in this snare, it would not be a subject of so great surprize. But when we see their experienced parents, for the love of gold, forcing their children into a bondage worse than that of Algiers, and in which they look for nothing but a life of wretchedness, we can only say of their love, as dying Jacob said of the anger of Simeon and Levi, “Cursed be their” love, “for it is cruel.” By such a course of things, we sometimes see the girl of sixteen, matched with the man of fifty or sixty. The one has gold, and the other has beauty, and *these* must meet and form a marriage. But their hearts cannot be wedded. they **TWAIN** are not **ONE**, but **TWAIN** still. This description may stand as a specimen of many more, of the different degrees and kinds which might be exhibited, in relation to the subject of unhappy marriages.

It is a duty taught in the gospel, that husbands should **LOVE** their wives as Christ loved the Church; and, that wives should **REVERENCE** their own husbands. And if these directions are not sacredly followed, such will be hindered in the Road of Happiness. Though these commands are plain and urgent, and the evils which flow from the breach of them are great; and, though

from obedience results great happiness; yet there are almost numberless instances, in which men *hate* their wives, and wives treat their own husbands with *ridicule* and *contempt*. Their want of love on both sides is so deeply rooted, that in many instances they throw off all restraint, and are full of their complaints against each other: nor do they hesitate to make those complaints publick. This is a barbarous and wicked practice! If these are to each other, such confirmed and inveterate enemies, who nevertheless have sacredly promised in the presence of God, angels, and men, to be inviolable friends; where can they expect to meet with friends, or friendship? Or if their want of affection does not boldly shew itself as above described, yet it rancours in the heart, and cloaths in a sour, morose garb, all they say and do.

The evils which flow from this source, are indefeasible and almost innumerable. The children of such families are often ruined. Their tempers and habits are so corrupted, by such examples from their parents, they are unfit to become heads of families, or members of any community. In the hearts of such families the spirit of religion cannot dwell; nor the practice of it be carried on among them. And nothing can prevent their present misery and future punishment, but speedy and bitter repentance. No life can be so wretched, and so much resemble the habitation of devils. Without repentance death only can release them from their dreadful bondage, and yet their release is likely to be succeeded by an eternal imprisonment.

But let the tempers of their minds and the scene be changed, and every family may become a little church, and every house bear a strong resemblance of heaven. Where mutual affection reigns, no life can be more happy, than to be united in the bonds of holy wedlock. To say otherwise, would be to impeach the judgment of God, and charge him with wrongly judging, when he declared, "It is not good for man to be alone." Thus united in affection, prayer and praise may arise from the altar of every heart like holy incense; and the mutual exchange of good offices will endear them

to each other, and make even afflictions sweet, and open a bright prospect of an eternal union. Study to please, study to be kind, and realize the obligation you are under to these offices, and you will find it difficult not to love. Few or none are without their infirmities, and if you have them, keep them a profound secret among yourselves. And if either has given just cause of offence, chuse the most favorable time to *bury it*, use the most loving words, and temper them with a loving spirit, and all such things may not only be entirely done away, but be turned to your own advantage, by putting you more on your guard in future.

Let those who believe, and yet have unbelieving and churlish companions, do all in their power to please them. They ought never indeed, to sacrifice truth and peace to the obstinacy of their selfish companions: But every thing consistent with these should be done. Let them see your temper is more mild and gentle, that you are more ready to serve and please them;—in short, that your religion makes you better and not worse. If they revile and oppose you, answer them in a meek and modest spirit, and in words of love: and the lion may become a lamb. If you do otherwise, you will find it a hedge of thorns in the Way of Happiness.

In case husbands and wives should differ in their choice of the modes of worship, let them avoid all harshness and censure. Be condescending and kind. If it can be done consistent with the consciences of each other, let them go together, to each other's places of worship. Or if this cannot be done, let each go to his own place without the least reflection on the other; and afford the same assistance, as if there were no difference of choice. For a religion without kindness and condescension is not the religion of Jesus; but the spirit of bitterness and persecution. And if one thinks the other in an error, and even if he supposes that error endangers his salvation, a persecuting bitterness, or sour stiffness, will never win him to the truth. But it may be done by kindness of behavior and speech. It is well indeed, if husbands and wives can agree to go to one place of worship; but it is better to be united in love

to God, and each other, and go to different places of worship, than to want this union of love, and agree only in the mode. Religion consists more in the temper of the heart, than in modes of faith and worship. Consider these things and act accordingly, if you would not be hindered in the Way to true Happiness.

It is a sin for parents to neglect the pious education and government of their children. And must also be considered a *binderance* to the *happiness* of both. Although this duty is made so plain in scripture; yet many never teach their children the fear and love of God; that they have souls to save; that they are depraved by nature, and sinners by practice; that they must repent and believe the gospel, and be changed from nature to grace; that they must by the aid of the Holy Spirit, deny themselves, take up the cross and follow Christ; and thereby shun the punishment with which the finally impenitent are threatened; and gain an everlasting enjoyment with God in glory. But instead of these, many are taught, profanity, blasphemy, anger, lying, strife, and a train of evils, which are likely to prove their disgrace and ruin. Or if they are not directly taught, they are not restrained; but left to chuse, and run their own course. The profanity, the prodigality, and depravity of our youth too strongly evince the truth of these statements! The duty of parents in piously educating their children, is too solemn and weighty to be trifled with or neglected. The time will come when they must see, to their inexplicable sorrow, that the neglect and abuse of such a solemn charge, is a crime of no small magnitude in God's account. Or why else should it be so seriously and repeatedly commanded both in the old and new Testaments. You cannot read and believe the bible, without feeling impressed with a sense of the importance of the duty.

But perhaps you have neglected the salvation of your own souls; and how can it be expected you will care for the souls of your children, if you have no concern for your own! And how solemn is the thought, that parents and children are together crowding the road to

destruction! And helping each other work out eternal condemnation! Be entreated to have compassion on your own souls, and those of your children. Or you may at least have to take up the bitter lamentation I once heard from the lips of a father, weeping over the lifeless remains of his daughter. "O (said he) that I had been faithful to have warned my child while she was living, but now she is gone, forever gone, and I can no more have an opportunity to speak to her." I was at this time strongly confirmed in deism, but it deeply affected me.

The good government of children is almost as much neglected as a pious education. Some are too tyrannical and severe; and others too weak and indulgent. The one destroys the courage of children, or else fills them with ungovernable rage; the other makes them self-willed, insulting, and peevish. To avoid the latter, parents should subdue the wills of their children when young; always make them submit when they undertake; never yield to their childish wishes when it would be for their injury; and ever carry a steady hand with them. And to avoid the other extreme, parents should temper all their government with mildness and love; that when arrived at sufficient age, their children may be convinced that their parents intend nothing but love. But never indulge them at one time, in things for which they are corrected at another. After they are old enough to know, never hire them to cry, by giving them what they cry for. In all these things let parents be agreed, and never interfere with each other in behalf of the children; nor suffer any one else to do it: No, not even a grand parent. If any one is allowed to take the part of a child when corrected for his faults; it will make him the more obstinate and disobedient. Keep up a distinction in their property, and never allow one to take the things of another without his consent. As much as possible keep them from the company of bad children, lest they learn their ways. Avoid clothing them in finery, and avoid all other methods which will have a tendency to puff them up with pride.—If you are as rich as the Lords of the

manner, never learn or allow your children to treat other's with scorn and contempt, (who behave well,) unless you would wish them hated of all men. But teach them love, humility, and courtesy, towards superiors, inferiors, and equals. On these things under God, may depend the temporal and spiritual salvation of your children. If you neglect them in their proper time, or do not persevere as you ought when you begin, you may have much cause of repentance when it is forever too late.

And may I not also add: Children should receive at least a common school education; and if they discover an uncommon desire for learning, they should if possible be indulged.—And if they shew a particular anxiety and ingenuity for any useful branch of mechanics, or any other suitable employment, they should by all means, be encouraged. Never fail to bring up your children to some kind of business, which if properly followed will afford them a maintenance. If you are as rich as *Cresus*, you ought not to neglect it. It was a proverb among the Jews, *that he who did not learn his son a trade; learned him to be a thief*. Idleness is commonly the parent of mischief. And if they are ever so rich and independent now, there may be a reverse of circumstances; and if they have never learned some useful employment, they must then be extremely wretched. Anciently it was thought no disgrace for the children of noblemen and kings, to be found in the common occupations of life. Witness the daughters of Nahor, Laban, and Jethro. And history records, that the daughters of kings gloried in appearing at court, in garments made by their own hands. But how has the folly of customs changed the scene! —But no female is fit for a wife or mother, who is so much unacquainted with the affairs of a family, as not to be able at least to oversee them; and if circumstances and duty shall call, to be able also, to perform them. Considering the plainness and importances of these duties, is it not strange that so many parents not only neglect but counteract them? These evils usually increase in all countries in proportion to riches and luxu-

no excuse. God has severely threatened it, and will awfully fulfill the threatening, on those who continue to disobey. There are also great blessings promised to good and obedient children. Let it also be noticed, that but few who have come to an untimely and disgraceful death, but what began their criminal career by disobedience to parents. It is also one of the most *unnatural* sins in the world; and I know of none more so, unless it is more unnatural, for a mother to forget her sucking child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb. Among some nations it has been punished with death. And if you habituate yourselves to it, you cannot expect either to live or die in peace.

It has been remarked by many wise and observing men, that those who were remarkable for their disobedience to parents, have in their turn been cursed with disobedience from their own children. If this observation is just, you may well look forward to a day of trouble. And should you in return have the same now given to your parents, it will bring to mind your past disobedience; and to be reminded of it by such means, will be enough to overwhelm you with guilt and remorse. Would you not then be hindered in the Way of Happiness, while under the government and tuition of your parents; or when you stand in the same capacity, O fly from disobedience as from a fierce tiger, and make it your one design, to love God and honor your parents!

Notwithstanding these considerations, which seem enough to overpower and bear down this unnatural evil, it is one of the most notorious sins of our land. Children and youth, shew an utter contempt of all parental authority and advice. As if resolved on destruction, they give up the reins to a depraved appetite, and precipitately rush the downward road.—Some children can hardly talk plain, before they profane and blaspheme the name of God with almost every breath. And they hardly leave childhood for youth, before they are found in all kinds of debauchery and excess. If these evils begin life, what shall be the end!

Remember this is not the Way of Happiness; but

the way of misery and destruction. Think how many sighs, tears, prayers, sleepless and anxious hours, your wicked courses have already cost your heart-broken parents! And can you delight in their misery! Or take pleasure in their distress! If filial feelings and human tenderness have not deserted you forever, return, O return from your prodigality; and let them have joy in you, before their sorrow shall bring them down to the solitary chambers of the tomb. Happy would it have been for them, to have followed you thither in your infant years. But you have lived to embitter or cut off their streams of earthly joy; and to be the burden and distress of their lives. But it is yet in your power, to raise their sunken spirits, to smooth their sorrowed countenance; and to allow their setting sun to cast off its cloudy veil of woe, and before it goes down the declivity of death, shoot upon them some reviving beams of joyful hope. And will you refuse a thing so reasonable, and so much to your interest! Had I the tongue and eloquence of a flaming Seraph, and could I speak the language of eternity, you should hear my arguments and intreaties; and were it possible they should be joined with tears of blood, if peradventure I might call you back to the line of filial duty!! O children! O children what will you say in the day of eternity, when God shall call you to an account for your wicked disobedience! May God bless this advice to your present and future good. And when I shall sleep beneath the clods of the valley, may this advice live to reclaim you from your wanderings, or prevent you from straying.

When youth set out in the world to act and provide for themselves, they are in danger of setting out wrong; which may lead them into evil courses, and prevent their happiness both in this and a future world. It is natural for them to wish to make a figure in this world. And those who are of the lower or middling class as to property, wish to move in as high and large a circle as the rich of their acquaintance. To effect this, they make their expences greater than their income, incautiously plunge into debt, till they are so involved they cannot escape. In this situation they lie under pecu-

har temptations to pursue dishonest courses, into which many fall to their ruin and disgrace. Or if they are so happy as to escape the common temptation, they suffer the loss of credit, which usually disheartens them, and they at best are mere cyphers in society. Young men in particular should always make some calculations for loss in trade or other business they pursue; that they need not promise more than they can perform. They should also be content to regulate their expences according to their income. It would be well, before they engage in any new employment, to take the advice of the experienced, and thereby to obtain as much help as possible. If they do not, their disappointments may lead them to fraud, intemperance, debauchery, and ruin. It is well known this has been the case with many. Hence others should stand on their guard. The honesty of a poor man will more strongly recommend to men of principle, than all the false colours and foppish grandeur of men, who are rioting on the earnings of others. Therefore be content to be what you are, and patiently wait, till by an exertion of honest power you can step into a higher circle of life.

We have now noticed some of the many, and the most common *hinderances*, which lie in the way of *contentment*. If they are properly considered, it will not appear altogether strange, that so few are contented and on their Way to endless Happiness. And by this time many may be quite discouraged in the pursuit of both. They may be ready to imagine, neither can be attained. They may consider the number and strength of the hinderances, and their own want of wisdom and strength, and from hence conclude, the way is forever hedged up before them. But be not too hasty in your conclusion. There is yet a straight and peaceful Path, which the vulture's eye hath not seen, or the lion's whelp trod, or the fierce lion gone over it. There is yet a light to direct your feet, and wisdom and strength, to make you strong in God and in the power of his might.

As it is no trait of the character of a lover of souls to describe the hinderances in the Way to Happiness, and leave his readers there, I shall now proceed to bring

into view the great and gracious helps afforded us by God, with a design to remove these hinderences, and to engage you all as travellers from Egypt to Jerusalem.

Let it in the mean while be deeply impressed on your minds, that these directions like medicines to the sick, will do you no good unless you take them. But if properly taken, will in due time effect a radical cure. If you therefore, hereafter pine under the distressing malady of discontent, blame neither me, nor the prescription, but yourselves. Nor yet think to be excused, because there are some bitter ingredients in what is prescribed. Your case is desperate and there is but one remedy. That must be used, or you must inevitably die with the disorder. It effects both body and soul. It terribly rages, and will soon dispatch you. Under these considerations, will you resolve through grace to follow the directions? If so, then consider.—

God has laid help on one mighty and able to save. He is an almighty and all-sufficient Saviour. His name was called Jesus, because he was to save his people from their sins. He is every way such a Saviour as sinners need. He is God and Man. As God, has an infinite fullness of grace, and goodness. His power and wisdom are equal to his grace. He is every where present to mark the risings of desire, to hear and answer the softest prayer of faith and sincerity. He is a prophet to remove your ignorance by instruction; and your darkness by his rising light; and to give the knowledge of yourselves and God, which is needful to salvation. He is a priest, and has made a full atonement. He has magnified the law and made it honorable; and the Father is well pleased with his righteousness. There is no want of merit in the atonement; the foundation is as broad as the world, and deep as sin's recess. As high priest, he is a powerful advocate or intercessor; and mediates between offended Justice and offending men. And if your prayer is inspired by grace, and is mingled with the all prevailing prayer of your gracious Advocate; may you not strongly and justly hope,—may you not believe,—may you not be saved! He is a powerful king. He can subdue your reigning and rebellious

tempers; and set up in your souls the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. He can give you the victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil; and make you more than conquerors.

As man, he has been in all points tempted like as you are, and can therefore be touched with the feeling of your infirmities; and as God-man, will succour you when tempted. He offered himself without spot to God, and was as a Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. As man he suffered, as God he atoned. Or the God-head so strengthened and qualified the Man-hood, and gave such virtue and dignity to what he did and suffered, as to make a full atonement, and open the Way of escape for Adam and all his guilty race. As man, he was an example of patience, benevolence, humility, perseverance, and every Christian virtue. Walk therefore as Christ also walked.

Through Christ, the eternal Spirit is sent to help your infirmities,—to convince of sin,—your helplessness, misery, and unworthiness.—To renew and sanctify the soul, and strengthen it in the exercise of right tempers, and to the performance of a new obedience. Its operations are universal,—they are free,—without money and without price.

There is an abundant provision in the gospel. Enough for all, enough for each, enough forever-more.—There you may find precepts to direct in duty, and promises to encourage to that duty. The path of holiness is made plain, the way marks are visible; and all the bye-paths of the enemy are so plainly shown, you need not miss your way. The character, designs, and snares of your enemy are also made so plain, you need not mistake, and take your foes for friends. Are you in want of weapons to stand against and overcome your foes, the gospel gives you the helmet of salvation, to save your head from wrong opinions; the breast-plate of righteousness to defend the heart against wrong tempers; the shield of faith, to guard the spiritual sight, and to keep the face of your christian character and profession, from being ingloriously wounded and scarred by the fiery darts of the wicked one: the sword of the

spirit, to cut down and defend you against the attack of external foes; the girdle of truth, that you may draw up from your feet the loose robes of common hinderances, and walk without entanglements or stumbling; and that you may also carry your quiver filled with the arrows of truth, to wound and keep off your foes at a distance: and the shoes of gospel peace, that you need not tread on, and wound the feet of perseverance, by the impoisoned arrows, which have been aimed at your heart in vain. Are you in want of medicine, behold the blood of Jesus is a balm for every wound; a sovereign remedy for every moral disease. Are you in need of food and nourishment, there is a fullness in the gospel—the bread of life, water of salvation, the wine and milk of the kingdom, and the meat which endureth to eternal life: and the language of the gospel is, “Come for all things are now ready”—“Come buy wine and milk without money and without price”—“Eat and drink abundantly”—In short, whatever your needs may be, behold in the gospel there is a full supply. But in order that you may relish and enjoy these blessings, you must realize as follows.

You must be deeply sensible of the disease of sin. You are born in a state of depravity, and are very far gone from original righteousness, and of your own nature continually inclined to evil. You cannot think one good thought, speak one good word, or put forth one good act, abstract from the grace which is in Christ Jesus. You must be convinced, and deeply convinced, of having sinned against God in heart and life. Under this conviction, your heart must be broken by a godly sorrow for sin, which must be so deeply wrought in the soul, as to lead to a hearty and sincere confessing and forsaking of sin, in practice, desire, and affection. All vain hopes must be renounced. Do not make a substitute for the Saviour, of the means of grace; nor trust in them only as appointed by God, to be the ordinary channels of quickening and comforting grace. Do not consider the most devoted, wise, and pious ministers, any higher than instruments which God may use for your relief. Never put dry morality and

pharisaic righteousness, in the place of the Redeemer and his merit.

Thus convinced of sin, let it be deeply fixed in your mind, that Christ is the only foundation of a sinner's hope. He is the way, the truth, and the life,—the only and all-sufficient Saviour. There is no other way, or name given under heaven or among men, whereby you can be saved. If you stop short, or trust in any thing beside, you fatally deceive your own souls. You cannot make an atonement for the smallest offence; and much less can you atone for your multiplied and enormous offences. The atonement of Christ is abundantly sufficient; and you must accept of it, and be justified by it, or perish. You are unworthy of the smallest favor; plead, therefore, the meritorious worthiness of your Great High Priest.

Come like the returning prodigal, overwhelmed with penitential shame and sorrow; and like him readily confess, in deep humility at the Saviour's feet. Come like a trembling *convict*, and cry with the penitent publican, "God be merciful to me a sinner." Such a prayer is the best—the only one you can offer with any real hope of success. Come then as a condemned rebel,—a miserable, blind, and naked Sinner, and venture on the mercy of God in Christ.

"None but Jesus, can do helpless sinners good." Ground your hope and plea of pardon entirely on his mercy. Lay hold on Christ by faith, as your prophet, priest, and king. He is offered in the gospel in all these offices, and you must accept of him in all, or you cannot be saved. You need him as a prophet, to remove the darkness and ignorance of your mind; as a priest, to make atonement for your sin, and give access to God; and as a king, to conquer and turn out the *strong man armed*, to subdue your corruptions, to set up a spiritual kingdom in your hearts, and to subject all within to the divine government.

If you thus venture on Christ, and accept of him as your only Saviour, hope, and refuge; you shall feel his pardoning love, shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. You will enjoy his favor, and walk in

the light of his reconciled countenance.—God for Christ's sake will take away your transgressions, and love you freely,—He will renew you in a right frame and temper of mind.

This change of heart brings you into the Way of Happiness, and begins the Spirit of contentment. It fits you to begin the heavenly race. And without such a change, it is impossible to be in the Way, or to run the heavenly Journey. The foundation of contentment must be laid in the heart,—it consists chiefly in a right temper.

We have already noticed the principal hinderances to the growth and enjoyment of this temper; and the helps which God has provided to remove those hinderances; it remains now to shew, how these helps are to be used, to effectuate a removal of them, and to promote a perseverance in the Way to eternal Happiness.

Christians may be tempted to deistical reasonings: Especially if they either believed in, or were inclined to deism, before they enjoyed the experience of grace. In such a case, the best advice I can give you, is to go to God in humble earnest prayer, and never leave wrestling till you have an answer. If believers would invariably take this method, instead of reasoning with the tempter, they would find it far better. But they neglect making their addresses to God, and fall into a variety of queries, the most if not all of which, cannot be answered by a human mind; these lead to doubts, and doubts to unbelief, and unbelief to darkness and distress, which too often terminate in backslidings and other evils. But rather go to God with all your troubles, ask his blessings, and he will send relief.

Next to prayer it will be useful to weigh the evidences of the Christian religion, named in the former part of this work. Lay hold on such only as are plain, and likely to produce conviction.

In addition to this, remember that the Christian religion admits of the same proof, as does your own existence. Were you to be asked for a proof of your existence, there could nothing more decisive be offered, than to say, "I feel I exist,—I am conscious of it." It cannot be denied, but the sense of feeling is the

strongest and leading sense. It gives tone and life to all the rest. Nor is less plain, that there is a mental feeling or consciousness; as well as one corporeal or external. No reasonable man can any more deny this, than he can deny his existence. And the latter is heightened and perfected in proportion to the height and perfection of the former. You may therefore rest assured, that an inward consciousness of sin and guilt, —of pardon and acceptance with God, are as certain, and as much to be depended upon, as any other consciousness, or mental feeling can be. I could as soon doubt of the consciousness of my own existence, as to doubt of the other, when it is clearly impressed on my heart.—It is unquestionably possible to doubt of both. But neither can be done, only by calling off the eye of the understanding, from the evidence which arises from such a consciousness, and by allowing it to rove on enquiries too great for a finite mind. But let the mind dismiss such enquiries, and suitably dwell on the twofold consciousness above named, and I doubt not but you may have as clear an evidence of pardoned sin, as of life and motion. If religion cannot be felt, either the soul is not as quick in apprehension as an eye; or religion is not as powerful as a mote. If one gets a mote in the eye, he does not hesitate to say he feels it. No one would refuse to own, that he had often felt in the mind the effects of other objects. And is the Object of our holy religion more weak and trifling than any other, that its effects cannot be realized? Rom. viii. 15, 16. 2d Cor. v. 1.

If you find a capacity and inclination to examine other evidences, you will find it useful. But still you may have one at hand. Turn your thoughts within.—What is, and what has been your consciousness?—Send your desires in faith and prayer to heaven.—What are your expectations? Join the expectations of prayer with your inward consciousness, and let both be exerted on the promises of gospel grace, and you will find it difficult to doubt or disbelieve; but confirmed in the Christian faith, you will be able to rejoice in God.

If you are tempted to a vain or sinful curiosity, in searching after hidden things; and to reject what God

has made plain, because you cannot understand what he has seen fit to conceal, you need not despair of a remedy—there is a way for your escape.

Consider then, the unhappy effects which have followed to others, by yielding to these temptations. Because their impious curiosity could not be wholly satisfied respecting the *origin of evil*, they have unwarrantably denied its existence, or called God its author. And others not being satisfied in all their vain speculations on the atonement and the Trinity, have denied the one, and pronounced the other unnecessary. In this way, they have been led on step by step, to the most downright infidelity, both in faith and practice. And if you begin to run the same race, can you promise yourself to stop short of the same goal? Let these unhappy consequences therefore deter you from a course, which has not the most distant connexion with your present or future happiness.

If you receive and practice the truth already revealed, you will find enough for piety and happiness; and if all could be known, which the most vain curiosity could lead to, you would be unholy and unhappy still, if you will not receive and improve what God has made plain. God in revealing himself, never intended to feed and gratify a vain speculation; but to lead to a hatred of sin and love of holiness, and by this way, to lasting happiness. Inquire then, whether the truths connected with these, are not as plainly revealed, as is necessary to answer their design.—The experience of thousands clearly proves, that neither impenitence, unbelief, hatred, &c. is the Road to Happiness. Consequently the opposite graces and exercises of repentance, faith, love, prayer, watchfulness, &c. must be the Road to true Happiness; unless walking in the *same way*, will be attended with contrary and opposite effects. Are not all these truths made sufficiently plain? He who runs can read. If then, the design of God is accomplished, by revealing what is necessary to be known for your happiness, why complain or disbelieve!

Remember too, the most contented and happy of all ages, have calmly rested on the revealed word and promise of God; and have humbly believed that se-

cret things belong unto him, and that they have no right to gratify a vain curiosity, by attempting to search them out. Go and do likewise, and you will safely and submissively rest on the promise of a God who cannot lie.

If you are proud, or tempted to pride, remember you have no reason to be proud, but many to be humble. Or if you feel the remains of pride yet in the heart, realize the following truths.

Consider the shortness and uncertainty of human life; the vanity and vexation of earthly things. You have often rebelled against your rightful Sovereign; and pride ill becomes a rebel. Consider also, pride is absolutely opposite to *contentment*, and must be mortified if you would attain the promised blessing. Let those, who pride themselves, in what a vain world terms *distinction of birth, dress, and riches*; realize that they must lie as low in the dust, and, that corruption and worms will prey as sweetly on them, as the honest poor they so much despise. Their present arbitrary distinctions will cease forever in the silent grave, to which rich and poor are incessantly hastening. And what may be still more mortifying, in the future world there may be the same distance and difference in this case, between the despisers, and despised, as between the rich Man and Lazurus. And let them enquire, whether the poor, which they would now disdain to set with the dogs of their flock, are not likely to be conducted to heaven by the ministry of angels; while they with all their present power, wealth, and pride, shall be denied the smallest favor, to mitigate the intenseness of future punishment!

Go, ye sons and daughters of pride, to the tombs which contain your relations and friends; draw aside the lids which conceal them: see their ghastly appearance; their corruption and worms; and all the deformity and triumph of death upon them. While these humbling objects of rottenness and stench lie before you, and irresistibly fasten a momentary seriousness on the mind, for once seriously recollect, these faces were once as blooming and as beautiful as yours; their bodies as decorated, and perhaps their hearts as proud: And

remember also, you must be as disfigured, and as humble as they now appear.

From the narrow opening of the tomb, look back on all the world calls greatness. See it lies in ruins! Before the relentless hand of time, beauty fades; power dies; greatness disappears; riches fly; honor sinks; pleasure palls on the appetite; and the voice of applause which made the world to tremble, is either turned to the voice of envy and detraction, or dwindled into a mortifying silence. Shall a reasonable creature, exchange his reason for the most airy vanity, by boasting of things so short in their duration, so empty, so precarious!!

Had you gained these things independent of God, you might have more cause of boasting. But they are all the gifts of God, and depend on his will. And it is as absurd for you to boast of them, as for a miserable beggar to boast and domineer over you, because he has received of your bounty.

But the most effectual preventative or cure of pride will be, deeply to consider the inexpressible goodness of God, amidst your present unworthiness and past rebellion. When tempted to pride let this be your chief weapon. Say, "shall a creature who owes so much to God, and who daily receives so many favors from him, boast against the best of benefactors? Can I be proud, when I behold the love of God in the gift of his well-beloved Son? Or when I call to mind, that the lovely Jesus humbled himself to death, even the death of the cross, for my salvation? Can I see his obedient and suffering life; or see his bloody sweat in the garden of Gethsemane; buffeted and insulted at the bar of Pilate; fainting beneath the cross; extended, pierced, groaning, bleeding, dying, on Calvary. and yet be proud, when I realize it was all in love for me? Or can I be otherwise than humbled at his feet, when I remember his loving calls and moving invitations, to turn and live? the manner in which they were rejected,—that though many years slighted and rejected, yet he still continued to call and invite, and after all had mercy upon me when I deserved the lowest hell!" Let these self-abasing considerations have a proper effect

on the mind, and they will not only overcome temptation, but mortify pride itself, and bring you low at the feet of Sovereign mercy. In deep repentance at your Saviour's feet, confess and forsake your sins.—Your pride should be your shame. It goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Consider your dependance on God, the multitude and magnitude of your crimes, the offers of infinite love you have slighted; the punishment you deserved for transgression; and tell me, will you give place to the habitual gratification of pride, or even permit any temptation to it to gain the least ascendancy over you? Or will you not rather abhor yourself, and repent in dust and ashes?

You may be tempted to evil in general, and to some acts of evil in particular. If you are tempted to atheism, consider, that the order, harmony, stability, and greatness of the universe, all loudly declare against the wild misrule of chance, and in favor of the eternal power and God-head of the Creator. No human composition will more effectually illustrate this subject, than Paley's Natural Theology.—If you are tempted to disbelieve the mission of Christ and his holy religion; consider, that the prophecies, his miracles, the surprising and happy effects of the gospel, all conspire to prove his mission divine and religion excellent. No imposture ever had, or can have so many marks of truth, as are offered in support of the gospel.

But if you have neither time nor inclination to enter into this kind of proof for the removal of doubts, or of temptation to unbelief, and for your establishment in the Christian faith; there is another which comes in the reach of every believer, which he daily carries in his own bosom, and will be every way convincing and satisfactory. Strictly observe what passes in your own breast. Does the unbelief to which you are tempted, have a tendency to happiness or distress you? Or if you have in any degree fallen under the power of it, were its effects happiness or painful? Look back on your former state of unbelief, and compare it with your enjoyment when you embraced the gospel as a system of truth, and then judge which is preferable. If you

find temptations have a tendency to lessen your happiness; that when you have in any degree fallen under the power of unbelief, you have been unhappy in the same degree; and, that your former unbelief was misery compared with a state of gospel faith; the premises are well laid, to conclude that unbelief presents false and delusory objects; and that the gospel is true. For it cannot be a dictate of reason to suppose, if deism is true and the gospel false, that the former would be the source of misery, and the latter of happiness. You may also extend your views to the difference, which appears in the death of a believer and infidel; and learn hence, that the gospel gives a cordial to a dying man, and deism administers the cup of despair. But in doing this, you should distinguish between real and false professors. Many profess faith in Christ and live like unbelievers; and it cannot be expected they will die like Christians. To this enquiry add fervent prayer to God, and he will give you victory through Jesus Christ.

Do you find within the remains of self-will, or are you strongly tempted to set up your will in opposition to the will of God; let the mind be deeply impressed, with the great evil and impropriety of opposing infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. You do not hesitate to require submission of your children, because of your superior power and wisdom. But remember, the disproportion of wisdom and power, on which is founded the claim of submission from your children, bears no proportion to the existing difference of power and wisdom, on which God founds his claim of submission from you. And if the one is an argument why your children should not be self-willed, but submissive; the other is a much stronger argument, why you should not resist, but quietly submit to the divine will and government.

Be also convinced, that all resistance is vain. God will not change his plan of salvation, or providential purpose, though you rave like a wild bull in a net, and strive against him with every breath. Such resistance is certain to be attended with vexation and disappointment; but submission with solid enjoyment. These you have often proved by experience. You cannot

therefore be at a loss which course to take, in order to gain the victory, and enjoy the blessedness of obedient submission.

Few evils more often beset and more strongly solicit, than the love of the world. The most pious find their difficulties in gaining and keeping the victory; and too many have found it a very insinuating and unhappy snare. It will therefore be proper to offer a few articles of advice, as helps to triumph over its enticing power.

Consider the incapacity of riches, to satisfy the craving and almost boundless appetite of a mind born for immortality. You have seen others with their vast estates more covetous, wrestless, and discontented than the poor. And from what you have known of the world, you have found it like a dancing meteor, which eludes the touch; when you have attempted to take it as guide, or to satisfy the mind with it.

The mind should be seriously affected, with the very impressive description given by Christ, of the difficulty of a rich man's being saved; on the account of the abundance of his possessions, and the undue confidence which such usually place in them. Nor should you be less affected with the caution of St. Paul, *not to be high-minded, or trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God.* Hear also as for eternity, that *the friendship of the world is enmity with God, and a friend of the world an enemy of God.* But no scripture relative to this head, can be more affecting and penetrating to the mind, than that solemn declaration to Timothy,—*He who will be rich falls into many foolish and hurtful desires, which drown men's souls in perdition.* Those who thus spake were well qualified to judge on the subject; they knew well the danger. And will you hazard your judgment against theirs? Or oppose their united testimony?

To be influenced and governed by the spirit or love of the world, is contrary to gospel self-denial, bearing the cross, the spirit of devotion, and the enjoyment of divine communion. These things are too evident to need proof. No longer then grasp at the shadow, and miss the substance. Let these truths come home to the

heart with their native force, and they will break the powerful charm of worldly temptations.

Lose sight of the perishing things of earth, and fix the eye of faith on your incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance, reserved in heaven for the persevering. Think how soon all corruptible things shall be laid aside, and believers possess the unspeakable glories of Paradise! Aspire for these, and you shall live above the world!

As you are in a world of temptation, you will no doubt be beset with envy. The evil of it has been described, it remains to point out a proper method to prevent yielding to temptation, or to eradicate it from the breast, if it has yet any possession there.

Consider, it is extremely unreasonable and improper, for one who professes the religion of the Holy Jesus, and to enjoy a hope of endless life; to lay aside the dignity of such a character, and take in its stead, one which has so strong a resemblance of Satan. It is very unreasonable, and opposite to the temper of a Christian, for one to make himself miserable, because another is happy. Real happiness in a great measure consists in the pleasure of seeing others blest, and of participating their enjoyments. That you were formed for SOCIAL BLISS, is a truth engraven on your hearts; and scarce any thing but the most *malignant envy* will wholly efface it, and bar the way to society and all its heaven-born advantages. Charity is opposed to it; every principle and precept of religion forbids it; and conscience gives weight and authority to the testimony. Invoke the aid and power of these truths, join Christian benevolence and faith in the promises, nor this, nor any other evil shall stand before you.

If bigotry solicit your attention, or have gained a place in your heart, you should apply to the great Physician, for the poison to be instantly expelled. As the means of this very desirable end, reflect as follows: "I too am imperfect in judgment, and may have errors equal to those, whom I condemn. I am convinced religion consists more in a right temper of heart, than in modes of faith. And those I condemn may have a better temper than myself. They may dwell in heav-

en, and I be shut out. At least, therefore, it is my duty to be *sparing* in my censures, and *charitable* in my judgment. Instead of making NAMES and MODES the standard by which to determine whether men are, or are not Christians, let me impartially observe their tempers, as they are manifested by their conduct and conversation; and if they bring forth the fruit of faith and love, let me encircle them with all readiness in the arms of Christian fellowship. I need much charitable indulgence from others; and owe them the same, and should pay it with cheerfulness. It is better to err on the side of charity, than on the side of rigid justice. I may judge a tree according to its fruit; but farther than this God has not permitted me to go; but has said, judge nothing before the time. I will make it a serious point of duty, to pray for all Christians and Christian ministers, with the same sincerity and fervor as I pray for myself; and look on the tempers and good works of others, with the same impartial and charitable allowance, with which I look on those of my own profession and party. And I am well convinced, *bigotry* can have no place in my heart; but it will be filled with love to God, and holy fellowship to all his adopted children."

If you are assailed with temptations to revenge, or find the spirit within striving for victory; take the following directions, and you will find them to be both a preventative and cure.

The scriptures afford many serious and alarming exhortations against it. They strongly and repeatedly recommend a forgiving temper. To the first is annexed very terrible threatenings; and to the last, mild and gracious promises: let the one deter you, and the other draw you.—Consider also, how God-like it is to forgive, and how much like Satan to revenge. And if in this case, you follow the advice given as a cure of bigotry; by going into your closet and praying for the spirit of forgiveness in your own heart, and then intercede for the other as for your own salvation, revenge must bow before it.—You will have a readiness to forgive, and rejoice to see the least signs of repentance, that you

may have the opportunity of forgiving, and of restoring, your enemy to the arms of pure affection.

But few if any Christian believers escape the dreadful temptation of thinking evil of each other; and multitudes fall more or less under the power of it. As this disease is often contagious, and proves destructive to spiritual life, it is the more needful to pay some attention to the preventative and cure.

Before you allow yourself to think evil of another without clear evidence, enter into your own case, and find whether he has not as much or more reason to think evil of you. Whatever your thoughts may be, they may be entirely without a foundation; and to think and judge evil of another without proof, is a crime for which you can find no excuse, either in the law of God, reason, or humanity. When any are convicted of evil, by believing it, and treating it in a gospel manner, you will find peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Ghost. But if your thoughts of evil arise from an ungodly jealousy, they will destroy your peace and joy, and place guilt and darkness in their stead. Observe then, which of these two, fill and influence the mind; and be sure that you follow the path of peace, and you will escape the power and dominion of evil thoughts against your brother. The love of God shed abroad in the soul, will incline you to make allowance for the *constitutional bias*, the *infirmity*, the *mode of education*, and the *peculiar temptations*, which may surround a brother, and in which he may be circumstanced; and will not attribute all such things to an evil intention, and the want of religion. If you find a disposition to do the latter, it is certain the fault is in yourself and not in your brother. Before you yield to evil thinking and judging, examine candidly your own heart, and know whether these evil thoughts do not wholly arise, from the want of that religion, you charge your brother with wanting. I believe there are nine hundred and ninety nine instances out of a thousand, where this is really the case. If so, remove the evil from yourself, and it will be effectually removed. And that it may be so, receive, consider, and practice, the above directions.

As few or none have their outward circumstances always to their minds, so they are more or less tempted to murmur, and too many are actually guilty of the sin. It is therefore a subject of some importance to know the remedy. Resignation to the will of God is the only radical cure; but yet there are proper means to be used, to effect an end so desirable. Be resolved then through grace to attend to the following advice.

Consider, whatever be your outward circumstances, they are far better than you deserve. You have rather deserved to be cut off from the enjoyment and hope of all mercy; and yet how many mercies surround you!—No cup of affliction is so bitter, but has some mixture of mercy.—Can you not see many who are more afflicted than yourselves? You may be denied of some of the smaller favors, which God bestows upon others; yet he grants the gospel and its blessings, which are far greater. He thereby puts it in your power, to have a well founded hope, that this life shall be your only state of suffering; and, that the next will be a state of perfect enjoyment.—God administers to all with a wise and benevolent hand; consequently, you have every possible reason to rest satisfied with his administration.—Other circumstances might expose you to peculiar and almost resistless temptations; but all these are escaped by being placed as you are.—Were you in any other circumstance without a suitable frame of mind, it would not lessen your misery or increase your happiness. But with a *right temper* you may be happy where you are, as far as happiness can consist with a state of trial. Therefore let a ready submission to the will of God, a joyful hope of immortality, and an assurance of the good will of God toward you; arm your mind against all impatience and murmuring, and inspire it with true contentment under every dispensation of Divine providence.

But instead of naming particular hinderances any further, and subjoining particular directions to each, I shall call the attention of the reader to the following general directions.

Fervent prayer should be used under trials and on all

occasions. It will be found eminently useful in every kind of trial. God has appointed it as an *ordinary*, and at the same time the *great channel* of grace to the souls of men. The use of all other means of grace will prove ineffectual, if this be neglected. God has declared he will be sought unto, to do all these things. It is in vain to think, of making him recede from his word.

The more you are tempted not to pray, so much the more go to God in prayer. If tempted you cannot pray, be resolved to try; and ask that you may pray aright. If tempted it will be presumption to pray, tell Satan, it is better to presume on the mercy of God in prayer, according to his command; than to presume on his justice, in the transgression of that command. Whatever may be your temptations, do not neglect to pray. Check the first approaches of evil by prayer. By so doing, you will prevent evil from getting a place in the heart, as it would do, if the duty were neglected. Much is often lost, by allowing the mind to become so distressed with temptations, before you go to God in prayer; that it is thereby unfitted for the duty, and it makes the victory much more difficult to be obtained. Therefore give the enemy no advantage; but pray without ceasing. He cannot withstand the prayer of faith.

Constant watchfulness must be joined with fervent prayer. A Christian cannot dispense with the one, any more than with the other. You have many enemies, their movements must be observed; their power, subtilty, and designs, constantly guarded against.— Watch your own heart, lest that be attributed to Satan, which allowedly arises from the corruption of your heart: it will be dangerous to be deceived in a subject of this nature. Watch your tempers and affections, lest human affections, or a strong enthusiastic imagination, is taken for the influence of gospel grace. Watch your words, lest something vain, unprofitable, and uncharitable escape you, which shall wound the feelings and reputation of a brother, and the cause of Christ. The actions of your life should be watched, that they may witness to others a heart-felt sense of piety, and,

that you have the mind which was in Christ.—Few things are of more importance to a Christian, than to watch for a right division of time, that every duty may have its proper place. Christian duties are various, but may all be performed, if time is rightly divided and improved. The letting time pass on unemployed, or triflingly employed, should with all watchfulness be avoided. The overstraining one duty, so as to make it interfere with another, or to prevent the performance of it, should be watched against with all diligence.

But in a particular manner, let the impressions of the mind be guarded. It is subject to various impressions, and without watchfulness, to be led astray by them. Every impression which does not correspond with the *plain written word of God*; which does not *naturally lead to the destruction of sin, and the increase of heart-holiness*, cannot be from God. If the present impressions of his Spirit did not agree with his written word, it could not be the rule of your faith and practice; or a SURE WORD of prophecy, to which you ought to give heed, as to a light which shineth in a dark place.—And it is evident, that he designs by the impressions of his Spirit, to make his people holy. It will therefore follow, that however impressions may animate and agitate the mind, they cannot be from God, unless they have a natural tendency to lead from sin to holiness. One plain text of scripture is more to be depended on, than a thousand dreams and wild imaginary impressions, which are not authorized by the gospel. I will not say, that God cannot and does not impress the mind in dreams; but I say, when he does it, he will always do it correspondent with his word.

There are always two extremes to one medium. It is especially so respecting religion. Some place experimental religion altogether in knowledge, or the light of the understanding; and condemn every thing as *fanaticism*, which shews the least warmth or zeal in duty. Others place it wholly in strong animating impressions, and ranting, wild notions; and confidently pronounce all dead formality, which puts on the appearance of regularity, study, and knowledge. But

quite warmth of affection with a well informed understanding, and you have a regular, well balanced Christian. But separate them, and you have on the one side, a frozen hearted formalist; and on the other, a ranting enthusiast. The gospel points out the safe and true Path; watch for its directions, and walk therein, and you will be led to true Happiness.

Read the scriptures with a desire to know your duty, and with a humble reliance on the grace of God for the performance of it. Keep the gracious promises in view, earnestly pray to understand them, and to have them powerfully fulfilled in your heart. Read them daily in secret, and prayerfully meditate on them. If you are the head of a family, convince them you love and venerate the scriptures, by daily reading select portions. Make the bible your chief book of study. If you read other books, do it in reference to a more clear understanding of the bible. Do not place implicit confidence in any human writings; nor yet be so arrogant and self-conceited, as to think such writings cannot help you to understand the book of God. By this method you may obtain a good understanding of revealed truth, and will avoid the common temptation of reading novels and romances; which are not only destructive of sound Christian experience, but also of good morality. It will also afford a good employment for many hours, which might otherwise hang heavy on your hands, or be spent in idleness. Your duty will also become more and more plain; and strengthened by the promises, the performance of it will be rendered proportionably easy. It will lead you to a holy converse with a gospel description of the nature, perfections, and character of God; to be familiar with holy things; and by often reading descriptions of the heavenly state, you will be led to examine your meteness for it; and be stirred up and led on to those tempers and practices, which will make it infinitely glorious, when you come into the possession of it. These things can be of no small importance to a believer. The more he knows of God here, the more intimate he is with holiness, and with the bible descriptions of the heavenly state;

the more happy will he be on earth, and the more glorious in heaven. He may also be like a scribe instructed into the kingdom of God, and be able to bring out of the rich treasure of his word, things new and old, for the instruction and salvation of others.

Let fasting or abstinence, be united with prayer, watchfulness, and searching the scripture. By a proper use of it, the deeds of the body may be mortified, which will be an assistance to living a life of holiness. You may also take a kind of holy revenge on yourselves, that the favors of God have been so often abused, or received and used with ingratitude. It may lead you to reflect, that the gratification of the appetite accompanied the first rebellion; and may thereby lead you to many useful thoughts on the fall of man, the depravity of the human heart, and the way provided for his recovery. It will naturally lead, to a survey of the luxurious and intemperate abuse of the good things of God; and impress the mind with the important duty of temperance and frugality. And while the body feels its need of food, it will have a tendency to teach dependance on God, from whom all blessings flow. And it will especially lead you to realize, that as the body cannot live comfortably without food suited to its nature, so neither can the soul. And as nothing suits its original nature, but the pure love of God; so fasting if rightly performed, will lead the mind out in constant desires for supplies of gospel grace. I apprehend the last is the chief, though not the whole design of fasting. You may have need however to take proper care, not to be so rigid in the performance of this duty, as to unfit you for others equally important. Fasting and mortification may be so extreme, as to weaken the bodily and mental powers to such a degree, as to hinder their proper extent of duty. Some have unhappily fallen into this extreme, while others have pled and practiced self-indulgence, and gone as far the other way: the medium lies exactly between. Follow the plain path of scripture, and you need not err.

Give alms to the poor. To do this according to the strict rules of duty, several things are to be observed.

Consider you own necessities, and those for whom providence has made it your duty to provide. But even in this, you will have great need of watchfulness and a single eye, lest you call superfluities and luxuries the necessaries of life: this is often and easily done. Consider, what is necessary to carry on to proper advantage, the business in which you are engaged. If you destroy your *capital*, you cannot do as much good either to yourself or others, as by a right employment of it, to continue the means of a long course of charity. Consider also the demands which are against you. It can be the duty of no man, so to give away what he possesses, as to disappoint and perhaps to ruin his lawful creditors, falsify his own word, and make himself appear, like a negligent and fraudulent man. When every duty of this nature is considered, let every Christian avoid covetousness, and be given to charity.

If time be rightly divided and employed, much may be found to search out and visit the sick and afflicted. Few duties will be attended with greater spiritual profit. You will find much cause of gratitude on your part, for the favors of divine providence, by which you are distinguished, favored, and made happy. Human misery and the extreme uncertainty of earthly enjoyments will be often depicted before your eyes; which may teach the important lessons of setting loose by the world, of laying up a treasure in heaven, and of longing with resignation for its enjoyment. These lessons properly learned are of infinite importance. And nothing can be better calculated to teach them, than often visiting the sick and afflicted. A feeling and charitable heart will learn more by such visits, than by all the lectures which can be delivered on the subject. Beside this, a consciousness of having done your duty. of having wiped the tears of the widow and orphan; of having wept with the weeping; and of having delightfully assisted them in distress; must be a source of unspeakable comfort to a feeling and virtuous mind. If done with a right temper of heart, and right motives, it will lead you to look forward to a glorious immortality, in humble expectation of hearing the righteous Judge say:

“ Well done good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. For I was hungry and ye gave me meat; thirsty and ye gave me drink; naked and ye clothed me; a stranger and ye took me in; sick and in prison and ye visited me; in as much as ye have done it to one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

You are commanded, *not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is.* Go as often to public worship as will consist with other duties. Let no trifling excuse hinder you. Go earnestly praying that the word preached, may by divine influence be set home on your heart; enlighten the understanding; rectify the will; comfort, strengthen, and build you up in the faith of the gospel. Leave all earthly cares and schemes behind, and permit them not to enter or occupy your mind, during the time set apart for the worship of God. Let the hearing of the word be mixed with fervent prayer and steadfast faith. If your mind is at first afflicted with temptations to wander on vain and forbidden objects, do not despair of a blessing; but continue to look to God for delivering grace, and you may be favored with a gracious victory. If you are not blest under the word, do not too hastily conclude the fault was all in the minister: it may be partly, or all in yourself. Use self-examination before and after publick worship, especially after, that you may know whether you may have profited by hearing. In this way you can hardly fail to be quickened by frequenting the house of the Lord.

All Christians should respect and love the ordinances of the house of God; especially the sacrament of the supper. This is intended to set forth the love of Christ to us, the love which caused him to suffer; the atonement made by him; to give us a lively sense of the obligation we are under to love and serve him; and to stir up our minds to a fervent zeal and diligence to fulfill this obligation. If God in the ordinance of the *supper* had these designs, and if the right use of it has a direct tendency to promote and effect them, it cannot be a light thing to neglect it. That God designed these

good things should flow to his people in the right use of it, is evident from the happy experience of multitudes, who have found the blessings of grace in communicating at the table of the Lord. Approach his table then, with sincerity and prayer, and labor to realize its important uses and ends. Look through the symbols to that body which is *meat* indeed, and to that blood which is *drink* indeed. By faith in a spiritual manner, so eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of God, as that you may have eternal life in you.

There is no one duty in which the children of God meet with more temptation than in this. Paul's words of eating and drinking unworthily, by not being understood, become a subject of great temptation, and often keep them from the holy sacrament. But the *unworthy* there intended, were such as had made a season of gluttony and drunkenness of the sacrament of the supper; as will appear plainly, by carefully reading the context. It has therefore nothing to do with your case, if you sincerely wish to flee from sin and cleave to God, and to do your duty with an eye to his glory. If you feel unworthy, it is no reason you should disobey the plain command of Christ, and thereby add guilt to unworthiness. Strictly speaking, you are not worthy of this or any other favor; and if you stay to be made worthy you will never come at all. Venture therefore on the worthiness of Christ, and come to the supper of our Lord. Never neglect, when an opportunity offers.

I have already supposed you possessed of Christian faith, and may now advise you to keep it in constant exercise, in the performance of all these duties. Let faith *give energy and life to good works*; and let good works *accompany, strengthen, and perfect* faith. Let faith lay hold on all the promises of the new and everlasting covenant, and bring them home to the soul with all their excellency and power. If you find a lack of faith, say with the apostles, *Lord increase my faith*. Continue to ask, and he will so increase it, as to cause you to triumph in the blessed hope of immortality.

Keep at an evangelical distance from *pharisaism* and *antinomianism*. Remember, that the most constant

course of obedience merits nothing; and that Christ is the author of eternal salvation to such adults ONLY as obey him. You may do your duty and profit yourself, but as it respects God, and the desert of his favor, you are an unprofitable servant.— God out of infinite goodness has graciously laid himself under obligation to bless the obedient, and though obedience merits nothing; yet you have a just right in the way of God's appointment, to expect he will verify his truth and faithfulness, in the benevolent fulfilment of his promises. Obey then with humble dependance on the veracity of God, and constantly look for the accomplishment of his faithful word. To such as trust in God, it is sure; it cannot fail; Banish all doubts and fears, and consider the power, goodness, wisdom, and faithfulness of God, as engaged for its accomplishment.

Are you surrounded with trials, and pressed with temptations; consider what support the grace of God has afforded others in circumstances equally, or much more afflicting: In deaths and tortures, imprisonments and exiles, in poverty and sickness, they have through grace been made more than conquerors. You also have experienced as great affliction in time past, and though almost ready to despair of help, yet God brought salvation, and caused you to triumph in his grace; and to adore the wisdom and power of that providence, by which you made so happy an escape. And now his arm is not shortened that he cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear. He is the same yesterday, to day, and forever. And the weapons of your warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down the strong holds of the enemy. Use your armor like a faithful soldier, and no enemy will be able to stand before you. Realize, that they who are for you, are more than they who are against you. The all powerful God is your Father; the ever blessed Redeemer your brother; the Holy Ghost your comforter, sanctifier, and guide; angels your ministers:— and who or what can withstand you? Go on then to certain victory, and an unfading crown.

Be always deeply affected by a sense of the presence

of God. He is every where present. He sees and knows your heart, words, and actions. He is well acquainted with all your trials and sufferings. He knows what light, strength, and comfort are needful to bear them—to resist—to gain a full and final victory. And he is as able and willing to give a full supply of grace, as to know your need of it.—As he is nigh, so is he a present help in time of trouble. Reflect thus on the subject, and you will find it difficult either to trifle or despair; but will be filled with Christian sobriety, courage, and strength.—Who can trifle under a proper sense of the presence of God, and of being inspected by his all-seeing eye! Or who can despair, while he realizes the powerful and helping presence of an almighty Deliverer!

Believe that God holds the reins of universal government. Nothing is left to the control of atheistical chance. Although God is not the author of sin, nor does he necessitate evil events; yet when wicked men *unnecessarily* commit evil, his providential government is engaged to bound, hinder, and over-rule their actions and designs, for his own glory and the good of the faithful. But do not imagine that sin is good, or in itself for the glory of God. Have right views therefore of the providence of God, and it will be an unfailing source of comfort and strength.

By attending to the gospel you will find others have been tempted and tried like as you are, and, that the promises of God are suited to all cases of temptation, and intended for comfort under them, and relief from them. It will then appear, that your covenant keeping God has seen his people under their various trials; and graciously made provision for them, by adapting his promises to their various circumstances. Consequently, there is no reason to despair, but much to hope and believe, in clear prospect of help from that God, who having thus seen your case, has provided for your escape and safety.

Consider then, he has promised you shall not be tempted above that you are able to bear, but with the temptation will make a way for your happy deliverance.—Are you afflicted, that you love God no more, he has

promised to circumcise your heart, that you may love him with ALL the heart.—Are you distressed on account of the remains of inbred sin, he has promised to sprinkle with the clean water of his grace, and cleanse from ALL filthiness and idols—the blood of Christ shall cleanse from ALL sin—he will redeem Israel from ALL his iniquities—he WILLs your sanctification—and Christ gave himself that the church might be *sanctified* and *cleansed* by the washing of water by the word, and be presented to himself a glorious church, not having SPOT or WRINKLE, or any such thing.—Are you poor,—such have the gospel preached to them, and may be *rich* in faith and heirs of the kingdom. Are you persecuted, rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. And so in every other circumstance, you may find promises suited to your case. Lay hold of them and never despair, while you have a disposition to embrace them, and while there is a God of power and compassion to fulfill them.

In all your troubles below have recourse to the sure antidote of the apostle. “These light afflictions which are but for a moment, work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

No translation or paraphrase can any way reach the astonishing beauty and energy of the original. This is easily seen by the labor of words used by our translators. *A far more than exceeding—a far more than an eternal weight of glory!* And the labor of the apostle seems equally to shew, that he fell short of a full and perfect description. When he had gone as far as words could carry him, his imagination seems to reach and stretch forward for something still beyond.

But let us consider the passage in its several parts. The apostle calls our afflictions light. To us this expression will apply with peculiar force. They are light in comparison of what the primitive church endured. And individuals may consider their's light, when compared with many of their acquaintance?—They are light when put in the balance with the great grace, which the gospel affords for strength and comfort under them. And especially light, when set off against all

the blessings of the new covenant, and particularly the eternal weight of glory to be bestowed on the conquering soldiers of Christ. By such a view of the subject, you will see, that to attempt to balance your afflictions by your blessings, will be as vain, as to put a floating atom in the scale with a ponderous mountain, or a single grain of sand with the vast system we inhabit. And shall afflictions so trifling cause us to murmur against God? Shall they be suffered to inspire us with discontent? Shall they shut us out from happiness and make us miserable? Will we refuse all the mercies of God, and purposely make ourselves unhappy, because we cannot be indulged with an uninterrupted scene of prosperity? Let us rather triumph over them all, in view of the greatness of divine grace and glory.

Our afflictions are also short in their duration,—They are but for a moment. And shall momentary afflictions keep us from eternal glory! They are momentary compared with eternity. Who can tell what proportion the longest space of time, we can conceive of, bears to eternity! And yet how short is the duration of our afflictions, compared with a space of time, which we can comprehend! Our afflictions will soon end, even if they are to be extended to the utmost bounds of human life. But they may be bounded by a much shorter duration. This may be the last conflict! Satan may never be permitted to tempt us more! Pain, sickness, and poverty may be making their last attack! This day may terminate all the frowns and flatteries of the world which relate to us! This hour God may wipe away the last tear of anguish and sorrow, and say well done good and faithful servant, come up higher!

Shall any grow discontented, and shrink from the battle just on the point of victory! What want of wisdom and what cowardice is this! We who have stood so many attacks from the enemy, can we not stand one more! Let it never be said, that earthly soldiers so cheerfully suffer, and face danger with so much firmness and intrepidity, and when others usually reap the honor and reward; and, that those who are fighting for an eternal weight of glory, are nevertheless cowardly,

and give back from the charge in the day of battle. Christ suffered for you, and are you not willing to tread in the footsteps of a suffering Redeemer! You profess an expectation, that this life shall terminate all your sufferings, and introduce you into a state of endless happiness: and will you not be cheerful and contented? Let shame and blushing cover the face of the wretch, who will complain in so good a cause, or desert it in the day of battle. You have every thing to encourage, and nothing to discourage you. This you will more perfectly discover, by attending to the happy fruits which result from following these directions: or which flow from the attainment and enjoyment of contentment. Let us therefore pass on, to take a concise view of this part of our subject.

Contentment embraces in itself all the blessed fruits of the Spirit: those who possess it are blest with the following fruits. They have love to the nature, commands, and ways of God.—The *love* of Christian *fellowship* to all who give evidence of their adoption into the family of God; and the *love* of *pity* to all men, their greatest enemies not excepted. They have a holy and solid joy, wrought in them by the Holy Ghost; by which they rejoice in the past and present goodness of God, and in the hope of greater favors. They have peace of conscience by the pardon of all sin, peace with God by having the enmity of their heart slain, and by being reconciled to God through the Son of his love;—peace toward the people of God, and as much as in them lies, live peaceably with all men. They are long-suffering under all afflictions and injuries; though provoked to anger and revenge, yet patient and forgiving. They are not fierce and voracious, like the devouring lion and merciless tiger; but gentle and mild, like the unoffending lamb, or the innocent dove. They have good tempers of heart, good words, actions, and motives of action. They have a living operative faith in God, and his word. They are meek—not rough in temper, and proud, but soft, calm, and humble. They are temperate in eating, drinking, sleeping, and dressing. See Gal. v. 22, 23.

They are blest with a hope full of immortality,—which gives great consolation, and enables them to rejoice in God, with joy unspeakable and full of glory. And if they enjoy contentment in that degree, which the gospel makes to be their privilege; they see the hand of God in all things, are resigned and cheerful under all his dispensations. Obedience is their delight. The use of all the means of grace become profitable and delightful. No one is more so, than the holding a familiar converse with God in prayer. They discover such a beauty in the divine character and conduct; in the plan of salvation; and in the commands and promises of God; that their souls are often overwhelmed, and lost in wonder, love, and praise. They clearly see, that sickness and health, life and death, are always best when God sends them. Willing that God should hold the reins of government, they rest themselves in the arms of his wise and gracious providence, with a comfortable assurance that all things shall work together for their good. These views, together with the love of God shed abroad in the heart, constitute the earnest of an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.

In short, the contented enjoy all the blessings of the new covenant; or they are pressing on to the enjoyment of them, as far as they are promised in this life; and are happy, as far as happiness consists with a state of trial. Having a love to obedience, and strength through grace to perform it, they feel an unspeakable happiness therein; and can joyfully testify, that the way of gospel wisdom is a way of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. Having a proper disposition, and spiritual strength to meet, and bear up under the trials of life; they are not made unhappy by them, but often feel a peculiar delight in *suffering* as well as in *doing* the will of God.

And when death comes to put a period to their warfare, they are so far from being overwhelmed with fear, that then they are often the most triumphant. Confident of the pardon of sin, of their acceptance with God, and title to heaven, they are able to shout, “O death

where is thy sting ! and O grave where is thy victory ! They see that death is the gate to endless joy, and that they have no just reason to fear to enter there. Many are able to say with the Rev. C. W—r. “ The nearer I come to eternity, the brighter heaven shines on my soul.” Or they can say with David, “ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me ; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” And though some die in great peace and calmness, and have a less appearance of overflowing joy and triumph ; yet others can adopt the language of the celebrated poet.

*“ Vital spark of heavenly flame,
Quit, oh quit, this mortal frame,
Trembling, hoping, ling’ring, flying,
Oh the pain, the bliss, of dying !
Cease, fond nature, cease thy strife,
And let me languish into life.*

*Hark ! they whisper ; Angels say,
Sister spirit, come away.*

What is this absorbs me quite ?

Steals my senses, shuts my sight ?

Drowns my spirit, draws my breath ?

Tell me, my soul, can this be death ?

The world recedes ; it disappears !

Heaven opens on my eyes ! my ears

With sounds seraphic ring !

Lend, lend your wings ! I mount ! I fly !

O grave ! where is thy victory ?

O death ! where is thy sting ?

They are introduced into an endless state of felicity ; where they realize what St. Paul himself could not perfectly describe—It is a far more, exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory ! There all occasions of sorrow and weeping shall be removed, and all tears wiped from their eyes. No more grieved with the backslidings and hypocrisy of professors. No more pierced and pained with the persecutions, hard speeches, and ungodly deeds of the wicked. They shall take up the lamentation of a weeping Jeremiah and a sorrowing Paul no more.

Nor shall they be grieved with their own short comings, and want of conformity to God. They shall be placed at an infinite distance from temptation, and no more be assailed with evil suggestions in time of duty, nor have one interruption to their pleasing employment through an eternal round of years.

As all occasions of misery are removed, so every thing happying shall remain and be increased. The appetite shall be perfectly fitted, to enjoy the rare and holy delights of heaven. Without which heaven itself would be a hell. God himself will be revealed with all the glory, beauty, and excellency, which finite creatures can bear. Angels, and the spirits of the just made perfect, shall be their companions, to join in the song of Moses and the Lamb. New beauties in the divine character and economy, will doubtless be forever unfolding, to attract, entertain, and happy the minds of the glorified. The past goodness of God toward them, in creation, redemption, and providence, will be a subject of eternal admiration and praise.

And what will greatly increase their felicity; it shall be eternal. Could there be the most distant prospect of its ending, it would damp their joy. But they have nothing of this to fear. They have every assurance possible, to believe it endless. Eternity! how sweet and harmonious is the sound to the inhabitants of heaven! To be eternally with God, and eternally in the possession of holiness,—freed from the possibility of sinning! O how transporting! how happying the thought!

If a day in the courts of God, enjoying that degree of communion, which consists with a state of trial, is so good as to be better than a thousand spent in the pleasures of sin; tell me! O tell me if you can! what will be the height, depth, length and breadth, of your enjoyment in heaven, when you have no corruptible body to press down and clogg the soul, or any other hinderance; but the soul strengthened to endure and enjoy the vision of God, and you have the fruition of him to all eternity!

Remember also, this body which is now put off, shall be refined and fashioned like to Christ's glorious

body; and shall be a joint partaker with the soul, in all the unspeakable delights of heaven.

Lift up your heads then, and rejoice, for behold your redemption draweth nigh. Now is your salvation nearer than when you first believed. Arm yourselves with contentment, patiently and quietly wait for the full salvation of your God. Keep your eye single; be looking for, and hasting to the coming of your Lord. Let the opening and blissful prospect encourage you. Press deeper and deeper into the life of grace. Grow up into Christ your living head, till you are perfectly fitted for that rest, which remains for the people of God. To these things let all the preceding arguments, directions, and motives move you. Let the love of God and man constrain you. This is the Way of Happiness walk ye in it!!

It is now time to take into view some of the many evils, which flow from the want of contentment.

The discontented are seldom pleased with the conduct of their fellow-men. They are disposed to find fault with almost all they do. They often imagine that their friends, relations, servants, and all around them, intend to disoblige and displease them; when indeed, they mean nothing but pure friendship. They are peevish and fretful as children at every little occurrence. Indeed they often fall out with themselves, and tease, fret, and find fault with their own conduct, but never strive to mend.

They are equally severe, with respect to the dealings of God towards them — They are displeased with the strictness, or what they call the severity of the divine commands.—The method of saving sinners revealed in the gospel, does not suit them.—They are always murmuring at the dispensations of divine providence. When the fruits of the earth are cut off, and they have nothing to vend at market, they curse God for the scarcity. When the earth brings forth such an abundance as to more than supply the demands for such fruits, they curse God, that they cannot sell what they have. If they enjoy health, they are unthankful and unholy; if sick, they murmur and repine under the chastising hand of God.

They are not prepared to live, and yet they fear to die. The thoughts of death, judgment, and eternity, pursue them, and fill their consciences with inexpressible terror. After having labored for a while under such a weight of guilt and terror, many of them begin to look for a *place of retreat*; and fly to deistical fatality, atheism, or septicism; and from thence into profanity, blasphemy, debauchery, and all manner of licentiousness.—Though some of them profess much, yet strictly speaking they enjoy nothing.

But the death of all their carnal ease approaches. They can sport no more. They have laughed at death, and all serious and sacred things; but now can no longer trifle. The Christians they once ridiculed, insulted, and scandalized, they would now gladly take their place, or even have their prayers.—O what guilt for past sin, what forebodings and terrors of futurity, now lie heavy upon them! Had they now undeniable evidence, of what they have before tried hard to believe, they could find some relief. But every thing appears different from what they hoped. They can no longer deny their accountability. Death has pursued them through every lane of life, till forced at last to the tremendous verge, at once they fall and sink.

Now an eternal scene of horror opens upon them. What must be their reflections now, when placed beyond the reach of mercy! Will they not take up their lamentation and say; “How could I be so unwise as to bar against myself the gates of happiness, and open the pit of misery for my reception! Once I had the strivings of the Spirit of grace; the calls and invitations of the gospel; the day and means of grace; but I basely slighted and rejected them all, and have justly, though UNNECESSARILY brought myself to this place of torment! O eternity! eternity! how awful and terrifying is the sound! O that I had listened to the calls of indulgent heaven, and been wise to embrace, and follow on to know the truth! But now it is everlastingly too late.”

If these things be so, O sinner, sinner! take heed. Why will you let your precious time run down to

waite! Why will you delude your soul with a hope that deism, atheism, or fatalism may prove true, and so neglect your everlasting happiness! Let me exhort you by all that is serious, weighty, and important, to flee the wrath to come, and lay hold on eternal life! Time is short and uncertain, death and judgment approaching, eternity endless, and your souls immortal! Consider the value of your souls, before you rashly refuse the salvation offered in the gospel. Consider the greatness of their capacity, and that they are capable of great happiness, or misery. O chuse the one, and refuse the other. There is no time to delay, for time is not only short; but God has said, his Spirit shall not *always* strive with men. How miserable would be your case, should it be taken from you! Let the terrors of hell alarm you; the joys of heaven draw and encourage you; the love of God constrain you; and the groans and sufferings of Christ humble you at the foot of the cross. May heaven bless you—and may this little publication be the means in the hand of God, of leading you in the Road of true Happiness, or Contentment; and may you journey from *spiritual* Egypt to the *heavenly* Jerusalem: There may I meet you, and join the song of Moses and the Lamb forever and ever. Amen.



CHRISTIAN CONTENTMENT.

HOLY contentment, which our God commands,
Is not a stupid dullness of the soul ;
It well consists with sympathy of friends,—
It bids the tide of pure affection roll.

It gives refinement to the human mind,
And makes the feeling heart more feeling still ;
And by its God-like nature seems design'd,
To fit the soul for all we see or feel.

Tho' sad afflictions be our lot beneath,
It sees the hand of providence in all ;
And humbly bows without a murm'ring breath,
Yields to its Sovereign and obeys his call.

But pride, and unbelief, and Satan too,
Would keep our souls from such a useful grace ;
The world and peevish nature join the crew,
To vex our spirits, and destroy our peace.—

If we would baffle all their skill and power,
And gain the prize for which we should contend ;
We must believe the word of promise sure ;
Gird on the armor, and their power withstand.

Consider too, our trials here are small,
Compar'd with others, and what we deserve ;
And eye the promise, which declares, that all
Augment our bliss, and shall God's glory serve.

Such faith and works the victory shall give,
And peace in streams shall water all the soul ;

And we a life of holiness shall live,
 And with the shout of victors reach our goal.

Heaven at last shall be our endless rest,
 Angels our friends, and God our Father be ;
 And saints shall join, to shout redeeming grace,
 And glory give to the Eternal Three.

But if we miss this happy frame of soul,
 And lift our hearts against the King of heav'n,
 We must lament while endless ages roll,
 Without a hope that we can be forgiven.

Let nothing hinder then, the great pursuit
 Of seeking, for this necessary grace ;
 But gain the temper, and bring forth the fruit,
 And stand prepar'd, to quit the world in peace—

WRITTEN TO THE REV. JOHN BRODHEAD.

*An acquaintance necessary for kindred Spirits to mingle
into friendship.*

ATTEND my brother while my muse shall sing ;
Perhaps I'll touch some *fibre* of thy soul :
Past scenes of life to present view I'll bring
In *min'ature* : I need not write the whole.

The hints I'll give, will serve thee as a clue,
By which thy mind shall gather all the past ;
And see the means, by which our friendship grew,—
A friendship strong, which shall forever last.

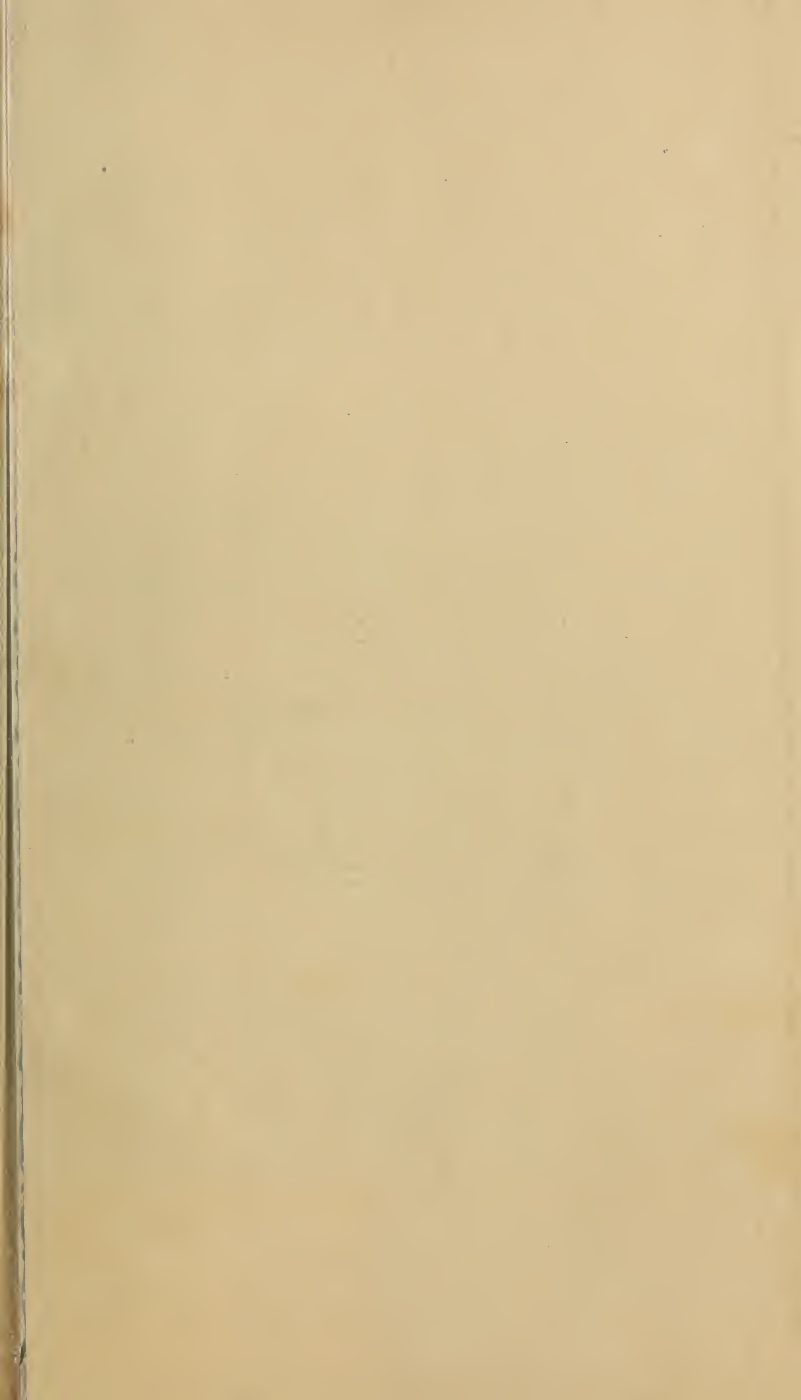
When first we met, thy *genius* could not see
In my *strange looks*, what now exists so strong ;
Some fears arose, lest I should treach'rous be,
Because *old Calvin** filled my head with *wrong*.

But *wrong* was gone and right had took its place,
(A lasting rock on which our friendship stands,)
And when we met again, we met in peace,
And mingled hearts, as well as join'd our hands.

In that blest hour we felt our friendship spring ;
It since has grown in a luxur'ant soil ;
Nor shall the force, which earth and hell can bring,
E'er break its roots, and all its branches spoil.

** After I had experienced religion, not knowing how to
defend myself, and by being baffled by the arguments of others,
I fell moderately into Calvinism : hence the fears of my good
friend.*

A clear rememb'rance of those happy scenes,
 With great delight now opens to my view,—
 When we embrac'd, and talk'd, and told our pains,
 Our joys immortal, and our prospects too.
 But most of all, in *sympathy* I feel,
 That we *alike* have shaken hands with death :
 We tho't e'er long to bid the world farewell,
 And meet on high, the Christ we preach'd beneath.
 In painful trembling all our limbs decay'd,
 Our vitals slacken'd from their vig'rous tone,
 Expiring life scarce in its lodgings staid,
 And ev'ry symptom said, "you'll soon be gone."
 But to compleat our earthly weight of woe,
 Old Satan form'd his hellish troops in haste ;
 He thrice assay'd to lay our spirits low,
 And make our tried souls a *dreary waste*.
 But God in mercy broke the tempter's power,
 And freed our souls from all his hellish snares ;
 With joy we call to mind the happy hour,
 When on our God we cast our painful cares.
 He still supports the feeble flesh awhile,
 That we may sound the Saviour's name abroad,
 Till we the battle win and take the spoil,
 And then in triumph rise and praise our God.
 Then let our faith be strong, our comforts great,
 Nor let an hour on earth be spent in vain ;
 Obey our God, the powers of hell defeat,
 Which may our God grant, for Christ's sake. Amen.



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